Weird Tales

Sept. 1932

The Unique Magazine

25 CENTS

The Altar of Melek Taos

By G. G. PENDARVES

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 3

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $2.50 a year in the United States, $4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4 London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The Altar of Melek Taos

By G. G. PENDARVES

A thrilling tale of devil-worship, of the Yezidees, and a beautiful woman who was to be sacrificed on the altar

1. A Dinner in Bagdad

SIR HUGH WILLETT caught sight of his wife's gold-crowned head at the far end of the table, and his lips twitched in a smile as he noted the rapt expression of the gray eyes under their unexpectedly dark brows and lashes. Evidently she was carrying out his instructions to "keep Prince Dena amused" with whole-hearted zeal. The constant steady flame of his adoration for Evadne—so young, and lovely, and gifted—gave a sudden leap in his breast. She was adorable.

"I've never seen Evadne look better, Hugh."

The voice of the Honorable Mrs. Richard Gaunt echoed his own thoughts, and he turned to the well-known writer and autocrat of London society with an almost fatuous beam.

"This climate suits her, suits us both, in fact."

"D'you let her run round with her paint-box here in Bagdad, as she did in Cairo? It's not very safe!"

"Do I let her!" Sir Hugh's face was a study in mock despair. "My dear Mildred, you know Evadne pretty well. Why revert to the obsolete and empty mockery of a husband's authority in connection with Evadne?"

"You're right," laughed his dinner partner. "But, really, I must acknowledge she can be trusted. I've never met a girl with her head screwed on more firmly. The only danger is that it is such an exceptionally charming head. Just look at the minx now, beguiling that poor man out of his senses. Who exactly is this Prince? I didn't get his name."

"Prince Dena ibn Zodh! That is his usual title. The whole thing is Ca'id Dena al Ilbrahim ibn Azzad ibn Kadr el Amastan ibn Zodh!"

Mrs. Gaunt patted his arm soothingly.

"There, there! I didn't mean to upset you like that, Hughie dear. This is not the time or place for blank verse, you know. What *have* you been drinking?"

"Fact!" replied Sir Hugh. "I wrote it down, and learned it while I was having my bath before dinner."

"It's a marvel you weren't drowned. But tell me seriously, Hugh, what does the creature do, besides looking so excessively haughty, and mysterious, and utterly fascinating? I feel like an *ingénue* at her first party whenever I look at him."

"I'll tell you later," he answered hastily. "My left-hand neighbor seems to be getting restive. She's been a victim to old Doctor Hamdi long enough to know that adventure of his in Damascus off by heart. I must rescue her."

The Honorable Mrs. Gaunt nibbled a few salted almonds thoughtfully, before turning to Sir Hugh's secretary, Hadur. He was an Arab of excellent birth and most scholarly attainments, having been educated at the famous *medersa* at Kairwan. As a young man he had been kidnapped by Touareggs in the Sahara Desert, sold to slave-traders, shipped to Mecca, and been bought in the slave-market there by Sir Hugh Willett, who recog-

"Prince Dena bent down to the lovely face, and his chant sank to a low murmur breathed against her lips."

nized his birth and breeding. Passionately grateful, Hadur had refused to return to his Algerian home, and had attached himself to Sir Hugh as his secretary.

A great friendship had sprung up between the two, which Sir Hugh's recent marriage had not altered. Hadur had merely extended the cloak of his grave protection and friendship to include the wife as well as the husband. The twenty-five years that lay between her and himself (for Hadur was some ten years older than Sir Hugh) made this easy, and Evadne accepted the former's unfailing loyalty as a matter of course. She did not dream of the quite unplatonic devotion that lay beneath the Arab's solemn courtesy, nor did he desire that she ever should know of it. Hadur was a profound philosopher; his dreams were one thing, his actual life another. He saw to it that they never impinged on one another.

"I AM going to ask you what I've been asking Sir Hugh." Mrs. Gaunt turned to Hadur at last with an abstracted air. "Who and what is this Prince?"

Hadur presented a sphinx-like face to her questioning gaze.

"I regret, Madam, I can tell you nothing."

"Can't, or won't?"

"He is here for the first time as guest," Hadur countered smoothly. "Sir Hugh met him last week, while superintending the excavation of the Daarb Temple."

"Yes?"

"But, that is all, Madam!"

"Nonsense, Hadur." The downright lady was not to be so easily turned aside. "You can't bear the man, and you've been looking like the wrath of Allah ever since the soup. Do please explain."

"I wish I could." Hadur abandoned his tone of light pretense. "I can only say that there is evil in that man beyond comprehension. I see the *Sitt* Evadne by his side, as if she slept within the coils of a rock python. He is entirely devilish."

His companion looked impressed; she was an intimate friend of the house, and trusted Hadur completely.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded, always eminently practical.

Hadur's eyes, under the folds of his ruby-silk turban, lost a little of their melancholy at her manner.

"The Prince is the guest of Sir Hugh," he reminded her.

"Guest! Sir Hugh!" Mrs. Gaunt's snorts of disdain were fortunately drowned by the lively chatter around them. "You know perfectly well that he would make friends with a Bengal tiger if the beast knew anything about the Assyrian empire! I suppose that is the bond that brought them together?"

"The Prince is surprizingly well informed," conceded Hadur.

"Oh, we were just discussing the fall of Babylon," she told Sir Hugh, as the latter relinquished his other neighbor to Doctor Hamdi once more.

"What?" Her host's deep chuckling laugh brought all eyes upon him. "What do you suppose old Hadur and Mildred were talking about?" he asked.

A roar of laughter greeted his reply, and Mrs. Gaunt defended herself ably from the volley of satire that followed.

"Are you getting foundations for your next novel?" one lady demanded. "Babylon will be a nice little change from modern London, dear."

"Very little change, in reality," retorted the novelist. "Mere superficialities of food and clothing. The morals and manners of the two cities seem singularly alike. What do you say, Prince Dena?"

She appealed across the table as the latter's darkly brilliant face turned in her direction.

"I must confess that my visits to London have not suggested an analogy," he replied in a deferential manner, "probably because I've not had your unique opportunities of studying it. Babylon was different from every other city the world has known, because it drew its power direct from the supreme Source of power."

A puzzled silence greeted this remark. Mrs. Gaunt stole a glance at Hadur's stern, set face, and experienced a quiver of apprehension, reflecting on the violent and sudden nature of Oriental reactions.

"You are going too deep for some of us," Sir Hugh voiced the general opinion. "The philosophy and mysticism of the East are rather too subtle for me, I confess."

Prince Dena ibn Zodh smiled faintly and turned his dark face, with its chiselled features and inscrutable eyes, toward his hostess.

"I perceive that you, as a mystic, are not out of your depth."

Evadne flushed. The poetry she wrote was very much of the mystic order, but she hated talking about it, never published it, and was startled by the Prince's divination of her abiding interest.

"You refer to the perverted use to which the Magi of the Assyrian empire put their gifts!" Hadur gravely interposed, successfully distracting interest from Lady Willett's slight confusion.

"Perverted use!" The Prince's level gaze clashed with Hadur's intent look.

"Surely!" asserted the latter, in the flat gentle voice that heralded his rare anger. "Since these same Magi forgot, or ignored, the mysterious laws of equilibrium which subjugated the universe to their control. Forsaking the law, they played with magic for the delight of king and courtiers, intoxicating them with every sensual joy. They forsook Ormuzd for Ahriman, and brought the Assyrians to the dust."

"So!" Prince Dena paused, a dark flame in his eyes. "You recollect, however, that from ashes sprang the Phenix!"

"And from the dust of Babylon sprang——?" Hadur also paused.

The guests sat in tense silence, as if aware that some tremendous question had been asked. The atmosphere was electric with the antagonism between the two men.

"From the dust of Babylon sprang the Angel Peacock—Melek Taos!"

The Prince raised his hand as he spoke. The candles—burning steadily in their crystal holders down the long table—flared up into high tendrils of flame. The hanging lamps overhead and in the wall-niches blazed with a sudden blue-white radiance. A golden flower-scented mist filled the spacious room; the sound of a reed-pipe, thin and piercingly sweet, drew the listeners' souls from their bodies. There was a perfume of musk and ambergris and roses, the gleam of night-dark eyes, of polished limbs and half-veiled bosoms.

And in Prince Dena's place a young monarch sat, ablaze with jewels and rainbow-tinted silks, who waved a languid hand to tall veiled figures that hovered behind his throne. Even as he waved, the radiant mist dispelled, the candles and lamps burned slow and steadily again, and the bewildered company sat staring foolishly at one another's familiar faces.

"Who—who are you?" Evadne's slender hand was at her throat, as she turned to Prince Dena. Then, with an uncertain little laugh, she snatched at the conventions.

"Why, you perfectly marvelous man! That's the most wonderful illusion I've ever seen out here! You're a real sorcerer, I believe."

"The devil he is!" muttered old Doctor Hamdi, annoyed at being so completely tricked. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Fairleigh," he apologized. "But, did you see it all, too, those delightful . . . er-r-r . . . houris?"

"I certainly did," answered the scandalized Mrs. Fairleigh. "You might have warned us we were to be treated to conjuring, Sir Hugh! I strongly disapprove of this sort of thing. It's quite against my principles to allow myself to be hypnotized."

"Don't blame our host," the Prince's amused voice cut in. "It was entirely unpremeditated. Merely an answer to our learned friend here." And he nodded to Hadur.

The secretary did not reply. He had begun to peel a mandarin orange, and his eyes were on his plate.

"Certainly more spectacular than the Indian rope trick," pronounced the Honorable Mrs. Gaunt, endeavoring to recapture her skepticism. "I suppose you wouldn't condescend to explain the mystery, Prince?"

"Not a question of condescension, Madam," he assured her. "It was based on rules whose existence you Westerners deny. The results of magic are obvious to your senses, but the history and derivation of magic you would class with heathen mythology and folk-lore."

The touch of fear on Lady Willett's face, the bewildered look in her eyes, gave her loveliness a lost unearthly air that made Sir Hugh long to rush to her side. Mrs. Gaunt, seeing her dazed condition, did not wait for a signal to rise, but got to her feet, commanded the rest of the women with an imperious gesture, and put her arm through that of her hostess, as they went from the room.

"Dear child, you've got fever! Better take some quinine at once."

"No, Millicent, not fever." Evadne's voice was low and shaken. "I think—I feel there was something quite awful behind that illusion we saw! I simply hated it."

"Darling! You're much too easily impressed by these Orientals. Wait until you've been mixed up with them ten years or so, as I have. You'll learn to take them less seriously. It was clever, very, but not really devastating."

"It was quite awful!" repeated Evadne.

"Certainly it was," Mrs. Fairleigh chimed in as they sank into low chairs in the wide stone gallery that ran round the house. "A most improper thing; these natives have no sense of decency at all."

"WELL, it was a good show tonight, thanks to the Prince. I thought they'd all stay on to breakfast talking about magic, and *djinnees,* and suspended animation, and all the rest of it. Even little Mrs. Fairleigh got wound up."

Evadne nodded, her clear eyes still shadowed by a faint fear.

"But you were as silent as an oyster, old fellow! What got your goat tonight?"

"There must be listeners for those who talk," Hadur answered dryly.

"You weren't listening, you were sulking, you old reprobate! What was it? Did Mrs. Gaunt ride her hobby-horse about the Meccan pilgrimage? Or does the Prince belong to a tribe of your hereditary enemies?"

"As to that, he is not more my enemy than yours."

Evadne looked vaguely about her for a cigarette, and Hadur was quick to see her need. She stretched out a firm, delicately modelled little hand, and turned it palm upward to look idly at the gold lettering on the cigarette.

"By the hundredth name of Allah!" exclaimed Hadur. "What mark is that?"

He took her hand in his own lean dark fingers, and bent over the soft rosy palm. A faint curious mark was printed there, silver-gray as wood ash.

"Aie!" The exclamation burst from Hadur, as if a mortal agony seized him. "Allah's mercy on us! When was this done to you?"

"Why—how very curious!" Lady Willett stared at the mark with puzzled brows.

"Did the Prince touch you? Think—remember—was it when he worked his magic at the dinner table?"

"Yes. I remember now, I felt a little tingle on my hand when the candles flared up. It was a peculiar pain, and went right through me. I looked at my hand afterward but there was no mark there. I can't feel anything now, but it won't come off—it won't come off!"

She scrubbed at her palm with a shudder of distaste, and showed the mark to Hugh, standing by her side.

"I don't know quite why you and Hadur are making such a fuss." He was tenderly scornful. "You've scraped the skin a little. Come along, I'll put plaster, and ointment, and a large bandage on it, darling, then you'll be happy."

"It is the sign of Melek Taos—the Mark of Power!" Hadur's voice was low and hoarse. "You can do nothing, Sir

Hugh, for the *Sitt* Evadne has been chosen by the Prince to be—*Wa hyat Ullah,* these lips will not utter the words!"

"What do you mean, Hadur?" Sir Hugh was suddenly stern and angry. "Don't you see that you are alarming Evadne? Explain—don't stand there muttering Arabic to yourself!"

"My lord!" It was seldom, indeed, that Hadur used his native speech, and a chill of fear touched the other's heart at the profound solemnity of Hadur's voice and manner. "My lord! It is wiser to tell thee at the outset what great evil hath befallen the *Sitt* Evadne. It is so grave and overwhelming a disaster, that ignorance would be the last extremity of unwisdom. That mark is the mark of Melek Taos—the Angel Peacock—the symbol of that bright Prince of evil, whose rule ended, temporarily, at the fall of Babylon."

"If I didn't know you for a strict Mohammedan, I'd say you'd been drinking," Sir Hugh interrupted, frowning. "What has Evadne to do with the fall of Babylon? What in hell—excuse me, darling—what on earth is an Angel Peacock?"

"You were right in saying hell," replied Hadur. "The Angel Peacock is the symbol for the devil, a *shaitan,* the ageless evil which men have worshipped from the beginning of time."

Evadne looked with fascinated horror at her hand.

"It is getting plainer all the time," she gasped. "Look, there are wings, a head! It is a bird! More like an eagle, or a vulture, than a peacock."

Both men bent over her hand. The silvery-gray mark was deepening to a dull black, and, as Evadne turned her hand this way and that, it shimmered with gleaming opalescent hues.

"It is very beautiful—very!"

Hadur turned on her with a desperate terror.

"Beautiful! Accursed, you mean! You must not be fascinated by it. Cover it up; you must not let that mark work on you as the Prince intends."

Sir Hugh drew her to sit beside him on a divan close by, putting his own hand over the strange mark, and holding Evadne within the shelter of his arm. His instinct and training prompted him to make light of the whole thing; he did not want his wife to be frightened, and he had always made a habit of resolutely turning his back on the numerous occult phenomena which he encountered in the East. Not that he blundered by showing the natives his complete disbelief in their many superstitions, with the exception of Hadur, but he cherished the belief that nothing supernatural could, or did, exist.

Something deeper than either instinct or training stirred in him now. With a quite inexplicable hatred he hated to see that glittering mark on Evadne's hand. Some fear, ancient and primeval as the foundation of the world, began to trouble him. Over dim unsuspected pools of memory, an old and terrible wisdom moved with portentous shadow.

"Tell us all you know, or think, or suspect," he asked Hadur.

The Arab bent his head gravely, and sat down opposite the pair.

2. *The Very Voice of Fire*

"I WILL give you the facts, as I know them," began Hadur. "Hear me out, however incredulous and repellent you find them."

His audience nodded agreement, Sir Hugh with a sinking heart.

"Prince Dena ibn Zodh is High Priest of the tribe known as the Yezidees. These people are devil-worshippers, and have been for many centuries. In the time of

Shaikh Adi, their chief exponent, the Yezidees bulked largely as a terrible and dangerous sect. They have a sacred Black Book called *Al Yalvah,* and in the Thirteenth Century reached their zenith as a ruling, influential power of evil. Since that time their power steadily declined, but the old reputation clung to them, and Jews and Moslems and Christians alike despised and hated them.

"In reality, until quite recently, they had become a perfectly harmless peasant tribe, whose communities lie scattered in the hills northeast of Bagdad, and in other countries such as Kurdistan, Armenia, and Persia. They practised a few rites and ceremonies grown harmless and unmeaning during the passage of time. They adhered to a few superstitions, such as never wearing the color blue, and never speaking of the devil by that name. The *Shaitan* they worship is symbolized for them in the form of a peacock. A marvellously wrought bejewelled bird represents their god to the tribe, and is kept in some secret sanctuary. When referring to their devil ruler, they call him Melek Taos, or Angel Peacock."

Evadne looked down at her hand, but her husband closed it almost fiercely within his own, and drew her closer to him.

"Melek Taos is something akin to Lucifer, only that the Yezidees think he will return in time to his celestial sphere, and that he rules this earth, meantime, by the direct command of Allah. Until recently, in spite of these strange beliefs, the Yezidees lived normally honest, decent lives. Their religion was a mere shell of the old faith, Melek Taos a focus for their instinct to worship. The old unspeakable sacrifices and horrible perversions of human attributes were completely forgotten."

"And the Prince, what has he to do with all this?" asked Sir Hugh.

"Everything! He has revived the old infamous worship in its entirety, every custom and sacrifice and obscenity of the devil-worship of the dark ages. Melek Taos, from being more angel than devil, is now utterly and wholly devilish. His worshippers indulge in every form of beast-like lust, and unnamable orgy. Torture, sacrifice, the bridal rights of the High Priest and other abominations have been fully re-established."

Hadur looked hesitatingly at the young couple, his eyes haunted and tragic.

"There is worse, much worse to come," he went on. "These things are the mere trappings and superficialities of the devil-worshippers under the new regime of Prince Dena."

"Good God, man!" exclaimed Sir Hugh. "No human being could do worse than this, surely!"

"Human being? Well, yes, as far as his body of flesh and blood is concerned, he is human." Hadur spoke slowly and heavily. "But the Prince has learned a power and a control that set him as far apart from human life, thought, and experience, as a great scientist is removed from the organic life beneath his microscope, or on his dissecting-table.

"You are angry, alarmed, bewildered. It is natural; yet I beg you to remain calm while I try to make clear what will bewilder you still more. These Yezidees were disciples of the false Zoroaster in the past; their ancestors treasured remnants of knowledge and power from the days of long-forgotten kingdoms—lost in the mists of time even when the Assyrians ruled. But these remnants of power perished and were buried beneath the stones of Babylon. The last secrets of Zoroaster vanished in the general holocaust.

"The true Zoroaster, born six thousand years before Plato, according to many savants, learned the great principles that control the universe. He, and his Magi, held the elements in the hollow of their hands. Above all things, they learned the secret and occult force that governs fire. Electricity was subject to them, and answered to their control as a horse answers to bit and bridle.

"They learned, through long discipline and terrible ordeals of purification, to liberate the will entirely from the senses, until they could hear the Very Voice of Fire, until they could focus the universal fire—the Astral Fluid that radiates from every sphere in the universe—and direct it as a weapon or a defense when they pleased.

"The Voice of Fire taught them to become seers and prophets, to impose any thought or feeling upon the multitude, to make themselves visible or invisible at will, to communicate with other Magi at the far ends of the earth."

"How?" Sir Hugh questioned harshly.

"By means of huge power-houses where the electric fluid was stored—seven great towers which stretched across the continent of Asia from Arabia to Tibet. These towers have long since crumbled into dust, but Prince Dena has erected a new one here in the hills somewhere north of this city. And I have information from those who work for me in this matter, that other towers are being built in Persia, Afghanistan, and Mongolia.

"Here, not twenty miles from Bagdad, the Prince rules with all the absolute sovereignty of the Magi of the Assyrian Empire. He has protected his Temple and Palace with the fire-mist and thunder clouds of the priests of Babylon. He has diverted the rivers which flooded and destroyed the old Yezidee altars. He has built his tower over these same altars, and there the living flame burns night and day."

"How have you learned all this? You've been with me for years, and I've never heard a word of Prince Dena. I knew the Yezidees existed, but that was all. Have you seen the tower, the altar, and all the rest of it?"

"When you journeyed to Europe with the *Sitt*, and left me here in Bagdad, I met a man whose daughter had been sacrificed to Melek Taos by the Prince himself. I may not betray her name—it was a great one and very honored here in Bagdad. Her father has great learning and greater courage. By an accident I stumbled on his secret purpose to avenge his daughter, and since then he and I have worked together. In disguise this man has visited the Temple, joined in the worship, and never rests now in his plans to destroy the Yezidees root and branch. But so far——"

He made an eloquent gesture of despair.

"I am not quite clear about the true and the false Zoroastrians." Evadne's face was pale, but her eyes were intent and steady, her mind absorbed by Hadur's words. "And the Prince himself, is he a true Magus?"

"He was," replied Hadur. "It is that which makes him so unassailable now. He passed through all the sternest tests and ordeals. He became an Adept. He learned all the occult mysteries that control the elements. He heard the Very Voice of Fire, and only death can rob him of his power now, although he has turned it to base and unworthy uses. The Fire he controls will destroy him utterly at last, as it destroyed Sardanapalus on his throne in Babylon. Meantime—he rules!

"I have told you all, *Sitt!*" Hadur met the girl's stedfast eyes. "I have told you

because ignorance would expose you to greater risk. You must understand completely the kind of danger that threatens you."

"I know, I understand, Hadur."

Evadne felt her husband's hand tremble on her own, and turned to him quickly. His angry puzzled look touched her profoundly.

"Darling, don't worry! This is the Twentieth Century, and we are in Bagdad, not Babylon. I think Prince Dena is a terrible man, I felt it from the first moment we met. But he'll have a hard time to get me into his temple, with all his magic and mysteries! Don't look at me as if I were sitting in a tumbril on the way to the guillotine. Remember, we're in the East, where one expects all sorts of things to happen."

Sir Hugh's gloom visibly lightened.

"You're an absolute wonder, really you are!" And Hadur's flashing glance confirmed her husband's admiration. "We'll tackle this thing together, and bring Prince Dena lower than the walls of Babylon itself."

Hadur fingered a cigarette, his eyes lowered. He had failed to convince Sir Hugh, but he felt assured that Evadne's attitude was more or less assumed for her husband's benefit. She was the more intellectual of the two, more inclined to the mysticism of the East, understanding much that lay outside the range of Sir Hugh's strong practical mind, more imaginative and receptive of the older philosophies, and, if more credulous, at the same time more subtle and flexible in her thought.

Meantime he saw her glance down at her hand, and the question he dreaded followed promptly: "And the mark, Hadur?"

"It is the mark that the High Priest sets upon his chosen. You are the woman whom he has destined to be offered to Melek Taos on the night of sacrifice, at the rising of the next new moon."

Sir Hugh rose abruptly, his anger suddenly breaking bounds.

"Don't couple Evadne's name with that beastly conjurer's! It's an insult in itself, if only a quarter of what you say is true. It is my fault that she has been exposed to his presumption. I was a fool to have been taken in by him in the first place. I shall see that he never comes near her again, confound him! That mark can be removed by caustic, or electricity. I'll take her to a doctor tomorrow."

Hadur watched the couple go. Evadne's smile to him, over her shoulder, was particularly gentle and affectionate, and the Arab's eyes were dim as he watched her golden head and cloudy draperies disappear down the long corridor without.

"Allah have her in his keeping! To save her I would burn in Gehenna for a thousand years. To save her! . . ."

3. *Vau Ruach Addonai!*

For a few days, Sir Hugh, anxious to prevent any chance that might bring Evadne into contact with Prince Dena again, refused to go away from the city, or even to stay more than an hour or two away from his wife. But as the days passed uneventfully, the thought of his workmen in the Euphrates valley began to worry him. They had reached a critical point in a most important job, when the Tomb of Queen Bal-el-Zouka was to be uncovered. It was essential that he should superintend the opening of the inner stone chamber. Only he possessed such experience and expert knowledge as was necessary for such a delicate operation.

Hadur was on the spot, overlooking the workmen, and no doubt could carry out the final diggings as well as he could himself, unless some unexpected difficulty

turned up. It was the chance of this last occurrence that worried Sir Hugh.

His strong common sense and cheerful optimism had quickly thrown off the vague alarm and suspicion he had first entertained with regard to the Prince. As the days quietly succeeded one another the Tomb of Queen Bal-el-Zouka loomed larger, as the Prince faded on his mental horizon.

"I really ought to ride up the valley, and see how things are going," he remarked at breakfast one morning.

"Of course! Why don't you go today? I shall be busy all morning. The consul and his wife are calling to take me to an exhibition of rugs at the Hotel el Kadr."

Sir Hugh's face cleared completely.

"Splendid! You'll be careful though, won't you, darling? That fellow, Prince Dena, may be hanging about on the chance of seeing you. I've given strict orders that he is not to be admitted on any pretext whatever. If those two are with you today——"

"Exactly," laughed Evadne. "I hardly think even Prince Dena would tackle so formidable a team! Mrs. Lamont would die rather than acknowledge the strain of Arab blood in her, and snubs all natives impartially. And he—well, he sees people and things as she wants him to see them."

"Poor fellow, I can sympathize with him. I know exactly what he feels like!" Sir Hugh looked as dismal as his jolly face would allow. "We must get together, he and I, and talk over this wife business. Can't call my soul my own now."

"Poor old thing!"

She had accompanied him to the entrance hall as they talked, and they stood looking down at the sunlit streets. In the shadow of the deep Moorish arch she suddenly clasped him with the quick warmth that made her so adorable to him.

"You are so dear and silly, Hugh. I simply couldn't live without you now—the sillier you get, the more I like you."

"That's lucky, as I'm heading in the same direction about you. Now, listen to the parting injunction of a fond but jealous spouse. If you see the Prince, cut him dead. By the way, you've still got the bandage over that mark. The doctor said you might remove it today, didn't he?"

"I think I ought to give it until tonight. It was a rather painful process having it pricked out. It may heal better if I wait a few hours longer."

In the deep shadow her sudden flush was not noticeable. She had already uncovered her hand, and seen the mark as clear and strong as ever, but meant to consult Hadur before showing it to her husband. The latter had been hanging about so miserably restless for the last week, that she wished him to go off without anxiety today.

"Poor child!" He patted the injured hand tenderly. "Well, if I'm going, I'll ride out now before the sun gets any higher. You may expect Hadur and me back tonight, without fail. He'll be surprized to see me turn up."

A last kiss, and he set off down the street to the stables, his white-clad figure very square and uncompromising amidst the flowing burnooses and rainbow hues of the native population.

HADUR was not only surprized, but passionately angry with Sir Hugh, filled with an almost murderous fury as he watched him approach the camp.

"Blind worm! Is he made of wood, or stone, that he can leave her to the mercy of that devil? Oh, by Allah, I could bind him on a wild horse and flog him into the

desert for this treachery to her! He has left her, lost her for ever, the blind dull-witted fool!"

Then in a moment his rare anger passed. He saw Sir Hugh, not as the traitor, but as the betrayed, and immense pity and sorrow filled him.

"El mektoub, mektoub!" he quoted beneath his breath. "If he must lose her, then she is already lost. Of what use to strive against one's fate? Is it not hung about our neck from the hour of our birth? We do but tread a path already ordained for our feet."

Sir Hugh looked slightly abashed as he rode up to Hadur, and busied himself with his mount for a minute, with averted eyes.

"Evadne's splendid," he presently remarked, rather jerkily. "Going off with the Lamont griffin and her husband today. I've given strict orders not to have the Prince admitted to the house. You and I will be back at sundown."

"It is well, *Arfi!*" Hadur led the way to the tomb without more words, and Sir Hugh followed meekly, knowing that he was in disgrace. But the feeling of guilt was swallowed up in excitement very soon, and for the remaining hours of the day he was too much absorbed to remember that such a man as Prince Dena existed at all.

The domes and minarets of Bagdad glowed redly in the setting sun as Sir Hugh, with his secretary, dismounted at the stables, and walked toward his spacious white house in the avenue of the Califs. A servant usually sat within the entrance, to question all who climbed the broad steps, and to receive messages if his master and mistress were not at home. This evening, the great arched doorway was deserted. The heavily studded door was closed.

Sir Hugh was about to give a loud rat-tat-tat with the stock of his riding-whip, when Hadur put a hand on his arm.

"Something has gone wrong. Let us enter quietly, and make our own discoveries. There are other entrances."

There were several of them, and the two men found the glass door leading into the palm garden was unlatched. They walked in quietly through a conservatory of heavily scented plants, and thence into Sir Hugh's private study. A strange pall of silence seemed to fill the house almost visibly.

In the wide tiled hall they saw a figure sprawled against the marble wall. It was Ali, the doorkeeper. He was sleeping, and so soundly that nothing would rouse him. Hadur examined him swiftly, lifting an eyelid, feeling his pulse.

"Not drugged! He is hypnotized!" he pronounced.

"Prince Dena!"

Sir Hugh's face was suddenly haggard with anxiety. Hadur's did not change from the settled melancholy it had worn all day. With one accord they turned, letting the servant slip back against the wall. They mounted the great curved central stairway, and reached the western wing, through a labyrinthin maze of corridors and passages.

They paused in the small anteroom which led to a lovely domed chamber, where silken rugs made glowing pools of color on the marble floors, and cushions and divans and rich hangings formed a background worthy of the great Haroun ar Rashid himself.

The anteroom was shut off only by curtains of damask silk, and between them the two men saw something that made them stiffen and freeze like game dogs, still and motionless as statues.

On a divan opposite, across a wide

space of floor, Evadne lay relaxed against a pile of gorgeous cushions. Her head shone like a golden torch in the last rays of the setting sun, her delicately cut features touched to an almost unearthly beauty.

Beside her sat Prince Dena ibn Zodh, his face in profile, like a classic bronze against the window, through which a crimson afterglow blazed. He leaned toward his companion, and the low murmur of a strange rhythmic chant reached the two behind the curtain.

Like a flower turning to the sun, the girl's face turned toward the Prince, her gray eyes wide and shining, her lips parted in delight. She swayed, smiling, closer, closer to the dark intent singer. His two hands went out to her, held the golden head cupped between them as he crooned, with a wild soft wail at the close of each verse:

O ye Red Mist! O ye swift Flame.
Melek Taos! By that bright name,
I serve thee with beauty.
Ahyahaiee! Ahyahaiee!
Dancing red Fire! Dancing white Fire!
Leap nearer! Leap higher!
Baptize this, thy bond-slave.
Ahyahaiee! Ahyahaiee!

Sir Hugh made an agonizing effort to move, to speak, to rush in and snatch Evadne to him. He could not stir a muscle. At his side, Hadur might have been carved from wood; not a tremble or a breath shook him, as he, also, stood rooted to the floor.

Prince Dena bent down to the lovely face between his two hands, and his chant sank to a low mutter breathed against her parted lips:

To thy altar, Melek Taos! To thy altar, O King!
At the rising of the new moon, Melek Taos, I bring
These white limbs, this gold head in thy bright arms to lie.
Vau Jotchavah!
Vau Opharim!
Vau Ruach Addonai!

Evadne's lips touched those of the Prince, clung there, while Sir Hugh was forced to watch with bursting heart. His will, his spirit, his whole being rose up in an agony of effort. Like a great force of water breaking down a dam, with a flashing of stars in his head, and a dreadful jolt of leaping pulses, he came to life.

He gave a queer moan of fury, and leaped forward, dragging down the curtain to his feet. His hands were at Prince Dena's throat, his muscles tensed, his whole intent to batter the life out of that smiling dark face. To his bewilderment he grasped only empty, air. Prince Dena stood at the window, looking out calmly; Evadne lay back among the gorgeously hued cushions, her eyes wide and vacant as a sleep-walker's.

"It is useless." Hadur's hand restrained him, his whisper was in his ear: "He is protected. You will injure yourself, but him you can not touch!"

Sir Hugh brushed off the warning hand like an insect.

"Let me alone! Let me alone! This is my job!"

Once more he hurled himself at Prince Dena, who stood with his back now to the window, his black eyes gleaming with fire. Sir Hugh felt a tingling shock that left him numb from head to foot, and he leaned heavily against the window-casing to steady his trembling limbs.

Again he flung himself upon that sleek, smiling enemy. There was a cry, a crash of broken glass, and Sir Hugh hung perilously from the window-frame, caught by a jagged edge of glass, and Hadur's strong hand about his ankle. It was an ignominious struggle to get back to safety. He stood within the room finally, panting, torn, bleeding, and with a fury that made his ears sing, and a mist clouded his eyes.

Prince Dena bowed with ironic gravity.

"I have the honor to bid you farewell, Sir Hugh Willett."

He turned to Evadne.

"To our next meeting, white flower of Paradise!"

He took her hand and carried it to his lips, and in a moment had crossed the threshold of the room and vanished more swiftly than a passing breeze.

"EVADNE!" cried Sir Hugh, desperately, as she rose with a sudden energy to look down from the window to the street below.

But the girl appeared completely insensitive to his cry, and to the pain and anger in his face. She stood with face pressed eagerly to an unbroken pane, and, returning finally to her seat, she sank down and gazed vacantly before her.

"Evadne!" Her husband sat down beside her, his voice rough with amazed anger. "What are you thinking of? Are you mad to let this beast kiss you, turn you into a thing of wax? Evadne, look at me! Listen, listen, Evadne!"

But the face he turned toward him, with shaking hand beneath her chin, was calm and still, the eyes brilliant, but their expression fixed and far away—the look of a traveller who gazes with deep longing on some distant land of desire, blind and deaf to all other objects in the way.

Hadur stood back in the shadow against the wall, watching Evadne closely. He looked years older than before he entered the room, a dreadful grayness about his mouth. His wise deep-set eyes were pools of brooding horror.

"Sir Hugh!" He came forward at last, and stood looking down at the young man as a father might look at a stricken child. "We came too late to save her, alas! The evil is past remedy. She will not hear your voice again. She will not see your face again. In her ears the voice of the High Priest drowns every other sound in the universe, and in her vision she sees only the bright evil spirit that has bound her to him. It has been decreed that this fate should come upon us all. It is the will of Allah!"

"Nonsense, Hadur!" The Arab fatalism had the effect, at least, of rousing the other to battle. "Why should Allah decree a thing of such awful horror? It is the result of my own carelessness. I left her—I left her! Evadne!"

His voice was softly pleading now; he took her hand between his own, stroking it, talking softly to her as if she were a wayward child. Then he and Hadur noticed the mark on her hand simultaneously, and both their faces paled.

"God!" whispered Sir Hugh.

The mark shone red as fire, brilliant, opalescent, baneful, a dark star in the dusk of that gorgeous room. And as the mark burned deeper and brighter, so did Evadne's beauty catch fire, and glow with a new unearthly radiance.

Again and again Sir Hugh tried to rouse her, only to find her in the mist of dreams where she walked alone. It was useless. The gulf between them yawned as wide as death itself.

4. *Flight*

"I'VE ordered the car round for seven-thirty this evening. Lady Willett's maid can follow when she has finished packing the trunks. We'll take the light luggage with us. It's rather awkward about leaving the excavation work, but if you return here after seeing us off at Port Said, it will make very little difference. You'll have all those letters and contracts ready for me to sign before I go, Hadur!"

"Since your mind is made up, I will have all in readiness," replied the secretary gravely. "Won't you reconsider this decision, Sir Hugh? You are making a grave mistake, and playing into the

enemy's hands by this hasty move. To travel in haste, by night, and without preparation or defense against attack, is to give the *Sitt* Evadne into his hands."

"What defense have we, if half you suspect is true? Not that I can credit your beliefs in his magic! All I know is that she has been hypnotized by this infernal scoundrel, and that I'm going to take her where she'll be safe from the sight and sound of him."

"My dear!" Hadur reverted to his native Arabic and mode of address, when profoundly moved. "Anger and sorrow blind thee to the truth. There are means of protection if thou wert willing to submit. The width of the wide earth between the *Sitt* Evadne and this Magus will avail nothing. She bears the mark of the Angel Peacock on her hand, the visible sign of her inner subjugation. Until that mark fades, she belongs to the High Priest who set it upon her."

"Good Heavens, man, what more can I do to have the mark removed? If the electric needle can't touch it, what can?"

"One thing alone!" Hadur answered solemnly. "The High Priest must die. Until he does, it is useless to take refuge in flight, and it will but bring a heavier weight of evil upon us all."

The other's face clouded.

"I wish I could stay and settle him myself." He patted a pocket significantly. "But when you return, I give you *carte blanche* to use my name, and draw on me for any money you need to get rid of him. If you could get the authorities on his track, let them discover this beastly sacrifice business you say he practises, it ought to be easy to get him hanged as a common murderer."

"No, no!" Hadur's eyes held despair. "Have I not said he was protected? No human weapon, no human force can harm a Magus of his standing. He has mastered the deepest secrets of Zoroaster, and it would be child's play for him to avoid the clumsy traps that the law would set for him."

"Well, what remains?"

"Fire! The Universal Agent! The Prince trod the bitter path of knowledge, passing from stage to stage until control of his senses was absolute. He has heard the Very Voice of Fire! Like the false Magi of old, he no longer practises the tests and ordeals of discipline. He is using the occult forces of nature for his own ends, not for the purpose of giving light and wisdom to the world. Only utter negation of self is his safeguard; therefore he is bound to——"

"Yes, yes! You explained that the other night. Meantime, the Prince holds all the winning cards."

"It is true. He is master as long as he controls the Universal Agent. But you have a saying, 'The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.' And so it is in this matter. The Law is always the same, call it God, or Nature, or Magic—all are the same!"

"Everything you say persuades me that to protect my wife, I must act, and act at once. I can't wait for the Prince to be caught in his own toils."

"And I repeat that you have not the strength or knowledge to protect her. Prince Dena must be tricked into exposing himself to the full force of the untamable element he uses so dangerously. Fire protects him. Fire must destroy him."

"Hadur!" Sir Hugh got up, and putting his hand on the other's shoulders, looked him squarely in the face. "I trust you beyond any man I know. You have been friend and adviser to me through bad times and good, for more years than I can remember. Now, for the first time, I can not rely on your judgment. I did

not realize clearly before that I am a Westerner, and that you are of the East. I can not follow your arguments. I must take my own way of dealing with a problem so peculiarly my own. My mind is made up. I am taking Evadne away, out of the country tonight."

With a sinking heart the secretary watched the other go off to his study.

"Allah hath permitted his eyes to be blinded, that he may not see the truth," he told himself wearily. "All haste is of the devil, and of this sudden ill-considered journey much evil will come."

THE moon had a red, angry look as it climbed up that night, to peer, over the shoulder of the Mosque el Harib, at the big touring-car standing before Sir Hugh Willett's doorway. The air was heavy, the stars dim, and a breathless heat hung like a pall over the city.

Evadne stood for a moment on the topmost step, looking up at the red disk of the moon, her lifted face so tranquil and exquisite, that a passing beggar drew back with a startled *"Ya salam!* Of a truth, the Unbeliever hath surely drunk of the seven streams of Isfadan! By Allah, it is a beauty not of this earth!"

"Come, darling," Sir Hugh gently urged her. "I think a storm is coming up."

She did not appear to know he was speaking, but continued to watch the angry sky. A low, long mutter of thunder rolled, and she smiled faintly:

"In the voice of the thunder I will speak to you, in the flash of the lightning you shall see my wrath against those who would hide you from me."

She spoke as if quoting remembered words, and Sir Hugh exchanged uneasy glances with Hadur.

Not until the three had left Bagdad a mile or so behind them, and were speeding up the long valley road, did Sir Hugh begin to feel easy in his mind. Hadur, in the back of the car with the luggage, sat anxiously watching the threatening sky.

As the road narrowed to a mere rough track between the towering hills, a sudden fury of wind tore shrieking down the defile to meet them. A curtain of utter darkness fell. The road was unfamiliar, a short cut to their destination, which friends in Bagdad had recommended. It forked to right and left at more than one point, and in spite of instructions which he endeavored to follow precisely, Sir Hugh became convinced that somewhere in the darkness he had taken the wrong turn.

He determined to drive on in the chance of reaching some village, or at least of finding some protected place where they might shelter until the approaching storm had spent itself.

Hadur voiced his own misgivings:

"We seem to have missed the road. I believe we are on the way to the hills where the Yezidees have their stronghold. Can you turn, Sir Hugh? It is madness to court disaster!"

"I can not turn in this narrow place. We must go on now."

"It is madness!" repeated Hadur. "It is the power of the High Priest that draws us on this path."

A clap of thunder, echoing and prolonged, filled the narrow valley with deafening tumult. Hadur's watchfulness increased, and he sat like a dog straining at the leash, his eyes fixed on the skyline above the hills. Sir Hugh gave his whole attention to the wheel, with a darting glance every once in a while at his wife, who sat beside him with a strange look of expectancy and hope in her eyes.

The coppery glow above the dark hills grew stronger, and lightning began to flick in long tongues of fire from peak to

peak. The car bumped and rocked over the uneven track; the occupants one moment dazzled by the dancing incandescent blaze, the next, plunged into a black sulfurous gloom.

The storm seemed to be following the line of the valley, with the car the center and focus of its fury. Hadur looked through the rear window to see a clear sky behind. Overhead the rattle and roar of thunder threatened to shake the solid hills down upon the travellers.

Sir Hugh's face was white and set, as he clung to the wheel, steering more or less by instinct in the darkness and infernal uproar. The road began to climb steeply, the hills drawing in until their jagged peaks almost touched overhead. At a heart-breaking double twist in the road, the car plunged into a shallow fissure that stretched across the way. The engine coughed, gurgled sullenly, and went dead.

The two men got out, opened the hood, and poked about anxiously to discover the damage, Hadur holding an electric torch. Nothing seemed wrong. Puzzled, Sir Hugh turned to enter the car again and examine the switchboard more carefully.

The car was empty. Evadne had vanished.

"Evadne! Evadne! Evadne!"

Sir Hugh's voice rang through the hollow-sounding place with a startled terror that the rocky walls threw back in a hundred echoes. Hadur sent the ray of his powerful torch up and down the path, but only the desolate track itself was visible. Sir Hugh ran forward, stumbling to his knees in haste, calling, running, falling, and blindly running on again.

Then a mighty burst of thunder, accompanied by a violent shaking of the earth, flung both men to the ground, and a second later the sky was split by a monstrous sheet of white fire that threatened to wipe the very earth from its appointed place and scatter its ashes amidst the stardust in the void.

For long the two lay stunned and blind and deaf, the earth rocking under them. At last Hadur crawled on hands and knees to the other's side.

"Look!"

He pointed an unsteady hand to the craggy summit almost directly overhead. A great arc of light burned steadily, a rainbow of gleaming fire, and beneath it the black massive walls of a building stood humped against the sky. Near by, a taller building loomed, whose metal domes and towers reflected the red light of the fiery arc above. A single straight gleaming tower shot up into the sky, its slender shaft quivering from base to head, with constantly moving light waves, like dancing water beneath a brilliant moon.

"The Palace of the Yezidees, and the Temple of Melek Taos! And there—there is the *Sitt* Evadne!"

Still on their hands and knees, the two turned their faces toward that fiery rainbow, and on the very summit of the crags a man and woman stood plainly visible in the brilliant light.

It was Prince Dena, and with him Evadne in her white-furred wrap. Still partly stunned, Sir Hugh got to his feet, wavering and unsteady, and tried to shout. His voice died in his throat and his numbed arm fell heavily to his side as he strove to signal to that small white-clad figure, poised like a bird on the dark heights above the valley.

With a roar, a cataract of rain fell like a black curtain, beating the two men to their knees again, blotting out the fiery arc, and the castle and temple, swallowing up the slender figure and the tall High Priest by her side.

In a very few minutes the path turned to an icy foaming torrent beneath the feet of the dazed watchers. It was impossible to see an inch before them, impossible to do anything save cling to some spur of rock and fight to keep their footing in that swirling rush of water.

5. *The Trap Opens—and Shuts*

DAWN found them flattened up against the overhanging precipice, soaked, chilled to the bone, and aching in every muscle. Underfoot the water was abating, though running swiftly as a river in spate down the precipitous way.

The car stood axle-deep in the yellowish flood, the fissure holding it firmly in position. Thankfully the two men splashed to its shelter, and were soon dry-clad and enjoying hot coffee and cognac from their travelling-flasks, as well as the contents of a well-stocked food basket.

The sun rose over the edge of the valley walls as they ate, and in a very short time its rays beat down in full strength into the winding defile, illuminating every crack and cranny in it.

"There it is!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, as they once more stepped out into the now rapidly diminishing water, and were examining the cliff face to find the track by which Evadne and the Prince had climbed on the previous night. "There, behind that outstanding boulder!"

They squeezed in behind a great mass of stone and found a firm, clearly defined track, which wound in wide-flung loops across the face of the rock. Barely visible from the road level, once discovered it was an obvious and easy ascent.

Halting at the top, they surveyed the desolate wind-swept heights, and the massive walls of the Yezidee stronghold. In the brilliant sun the light was reflected from every dome and roof, but chiefly focussed on the tall slender shaft of the Shining Tower, which rose like a pillar of fire from amidst the temple domes. Its light was not steady, but flashed and winked like that of a lighthouse signal, with a radiance that made it impossible to watch it continuously.

"It's a sort of super-heliograph," asserted Sir Hugh. "They are signaling to their brother Yezidees, no doubt. Nothing of a miraculous nature about it. The material they've used in the Tower is exceptional, I admit; I never saw anything attract the sun's rays so powerfully. On the other hand, the sun itself is a miracle out here."

Hadur made no attempt to rob his companion of the comfort of this logical explanation of the wonder before them. He knew that the light-rays from that infernal Tower drew their power from every shining star and planet in the universe, and that they sent out a force that touched people and events as far removed as the poles. The Universal Agent was concentrated and focussed here, gathered up by means of the Tower into a vast storehouse, in the identical manner in which the true disciples of Zoroaster had learned to gather and store it thousands of years ago.

For good or evil, a blind terrific force was harnessed here to earth, and the thought of it in the hands of Prince Dena made Hadur shudder to the soul.

"Those fellows by the gate are watching us. We'd better try to gain admittance there."

Sir Hugh walked resolutely forward as he spoke, and for the hundredth time his secretary admired the courage and resolution which were such marked characteristics of this unimaginative man.

"We seek an audience with the Prince ibn Zodh," Sir Hugh addressed one of the wooden-faced guards. The latter looked rather like two figures from a

child's Noah's Ark, as they stood in their long straight black tunics and tightly bound red turbans. Both guards shook their heads solemnly and gazed past the two visitors to the parched heights beyond.

"We would speak with the High Priest. In the name of Melek Taos, we crave admittance." Hadur's tone was commanding.

The faces of the two guards instantly altered to alert wariness.

"The password," they said in unison.

"Phlagus, Schiekron, and Aclahayr, genii of the fourth Hour," replied Hadur.

The two guards saluted humbly, and stood aside.

"Enter, Masters of the Hour! The way lies open."

Silencing Sir Hugh with a warning look, Hadur led the way into a great courtyard, murmuring as they left the guards behind:

"Leave it to me now. I have learned enough to get us inside the palace. After that——"

THE courtyard was a rectangular enclosure, its towering walls shutting out every gleam of sun. A single low squat doorway broke the dark polished surfaces that closed them in, over which a figure stood out in bas-relief—the figure of a bird, from whose head bright darting flames shot upward. It was a replica of the winged bird which Evadne bore on her hand, and Sir Hugh recognized it with a shudder of disgust.

Two more guards stood here, and challenged Hadur promptly.

"The Black Sword of Gaffarel, Watcher in the House of Mercury," he replied.

"Pass, Magi, diviners of the Great Mystery."

Sir Hugh followed his secretary with a rising anger. He loathed all this mummery, the darkness, the half-seen kabalistic lettering on the walls, the exchange of meaningless words at every entrance door, the air of mystery that the unusual surroundings provoked. He realized that his mind was succumbing, despite his will, to a sense of fear and foreboding, and his sturdy common sense rebelled at such impositions on it.

Hadur turned to see the impatient anger in his eyes.

"Remember," he warned in a whisper, "the *Sitt* Evadne is helpless here; we are all she has to help her now. Do not let your anger betray you."

From one vaulted chamber to another they passed; at each came the challenge and Hadur's quietly assured answer to it. The winged bird met their eyes on every hand, in some form or another—on the robes of the sphinx-like guards; in flaming iridescent colors on the dull smooth blackness of the walls; in the form of hanging lamps in which dancing flames moved ceaselessly in the gloom; or poised over altars on which long tongues of fire writhed like serpents in the shadow of deep-cut archways.

"It's getting infernally hot," muttered Sir Hugh, as they penetrated still further into the interior of the great palace. "And is it my imagination, or do you hear that strange hissing sound? It's been getting steadily louder and louder."

"We are close to the audience chamber, from what my friend told me. This is the hour for the Ritual Dance, and you'll understand the heat and the sound in a few minutes."

The noise increased to a humming roar as they passed another entrance. Hadur, under pretense of stooping to admire an immense glittering presentment of Melek Taos wrought in crystal and holding a great ball of fire in its beak, spoke rapidly to his companion.

"The Prince will bait us. Be prepared to hear and see anything—anything! But keep silent, watch closely, and do not be betrayed into passion."

At the last doorway no guards stood, but across the threshold hung a moving curtain of fire and cloud. Hadur walked straight forward, and Sir Hugh, wrought up to a pitch when he would have taken pleasure in engaging a grizzly bear to single combat, flung himself across the fire-mist without a pause.

A loud purring hum of fire greeted them, and in the first moment they thought the vaulted room in which they stood was going up in flames. As their eyes grew accustomed to the glare, they saw that the tall branching pillars of fire that swept across the length and breadth of the vast room did not touch the gleaming inlaid floor, but played in the air in a sort of fantastic weaving dance.

As they saw the meaning and purpose of the fire, they drew back in sick incredulous horror.

Between the tall flames, like moths blown by a sirocco, a nude capering crowd ran frantically to and fro, striving with unearthly yells to escape the torture of the licking flames; gaunt, deformed, inhuman objects, scarred and withered to the bone. They were the ceremonial dancers, preserved from death by the magic of the very power which tormented them.

"She is there—the *Sitt* Evadne!"

Hadur, more prepared for the unparalleled horrors of the Prince's stronghold, pointed to a massive platform against the wall to their right.

Sir Hugh turned to see her seated beside the High Priest, her eyes fixed in a blank stare on the capering figures below her. Vainly he looked for some means of reaching her, but the platform was high and smoothly polished to its base, and no steps led to it from the floor.

"Evadne!" he called, standing directly beneath her. "Evadne!"

The love and despair in his voice would have summoned her from the last dim portals of death itself. It summoned her now. She stood up, her eyes grave and intent.

"Who calls me?" Her words came softly perplexed. "Oh—who calls?"

Sir Hugh's very soul stood in his eyes as he looked up into her bewildered face.

"Evadne, darling! It is Hugh! Hugh, your husband! Come back to me, Evadne, come back to me!"

The frozen bewilderment broke up, her eyes met his with a sudden tragic awareness.

"Hugh! Hugh, save me! Something . . . holds me! Hugh . . . my darling!"

Prince Dena rose and put a hand on her arm. Instantly all the quick color faded from her face, and she turned with the old dreaming adoration to the Prince.

"We welcome you to our palace, Sir Hugh Willett!" The High Priest bowed mockingly, Evadne's hand clasped in his own. "Tonight we hold the Feast of Sacrifice. Tonight we celebrate my union with this woman whom Melek Taos has seen fit to bestow on me, his devoted servant. Never has it been my lot to hold such golden loveliness in my arms before."

SIR HUGH strove to speak, to move, to curse that smiling, wonderfully chiselled face that looked down upon him. The roaring increased in his ears, the bright flames seemed to dance toward him. Then, at a sign from their master, they receded suddenly like a tide ebbing, and the taunting voice of his enemy came clear through the mist and confusion.

"Not yet, not yet, my servants! He shall join in our Feast tonight. He shall watch me woo this golden loveliness

from his embrace. He shall witness the sacrifice at the rising of the new moon, and stand helpless, O Melek Taos, when thou dost stoop from thy heaven to the Altar! Stoop to thy victim—the perfect sacrifice which I will give thee at the rising of the moon!"

The tide of fire rolled back, sweeping with it those agonized shrieking figures—back—back, with an ever-diminishing hum and crackle, until the vast hall stood empty. The two on the platform vanished also, leaving Sir Hugh shaking in every limb, leaning on Hadur with eyes staring wildly at the deserted thrones of ebony above him.

"Gone! With him—with him!"

Suddenly he made a dash to the arched doorway by which he had entered, but as he neared the fire-mist, a flame shot out and curled about him like a serpent, scorching and blackening his face and hands.

Staggering back, he looked around the great empty hall and discovered other archways set in every wall between broad pillars, on which the signs of the zodiac gleamed in red and gold. No doors barred these open arches, no guards stood before them, no curtain of fire and cloud hung over them.

Yet Sir Hugh could not pass them.

Blind with grief and rage, reckless as a wounded jungle beast, he assaulted each empty threshold in turn. From each he was hurled back by some violent force that sent him reeling and spinning across the floor, only to rise and dash blindly at another entrance.

Hadur watched him with tears. At last, his brief madness of despair over, and convinced that he was indeed a prisoner, he turned to the faithful Arab and sat down beside him with his head between his hands.

"*Arfi!* All is not yet lost. Do not give way to utter despair while the *Sitt* Evadne is still safe. Allah is merciful, and may even yet restore her to thee."

"Evadne safe? With him?"

"Safe until the rising of the moon," declared Hadur. "That much I have learned from the father whose daughter was a Bride of Melek Taos."

"Safe?—with that hell-fiend all the long hours of this day?"

"*Arfi,* I swear by Allah, and by the life of this body, that the High Priest will not touch her until tonight. He dares not! There are laws even a false Magus may not break, unless he desires instant annihilation. For many days before the sacrifice the High Priest must prepare himself, and abstain from many things. The lips of the destined Bride are one of these things taboo. Until tonight she is safe."

The other merely groaned.

"It is the truth," repeated Hadur. "The High Priest may not drink of his cup of love until the destined hour. It is a ceremony of mystic union in which the Angel Peacock shares. Even Prince Dena dare not insult his god!"

Sir Hugh bowed his head to his hands again, and Hadur's eyes mirrored his own agony, as he stared bleakly before him.

"*Ya habiby!*" he murmured under his breath. "Ah, my beloved! Cursed be he who hath set this darkness in thy path! May the devils he serves rend his soul from his body, and send it shrieking down to hell. *Wa hyat rukbaty,* I will follow him to the deepest pit of Gehenna, if he brings that youth and beauty to the dust. Allah be my witness! Allah hear me! Give strength to thy servant! Hear me, hear me, thou just and compassionate One!"

He sat very still, striving to master the tide of love and agony that overwhelmed

him, striving to find a gleam of hope in the darkness.

6. *The Altar of Melek Taos*

As SARDANAPALUS, King of Babylon, had feasted with his Magi, and women, and favorites, and all the sycophants of a fabulously wealthy court, so did the Prince Dena ibn Zodh, in his black and scarlet robes of ceremony, sit with Evadne at his side on the night of sacrifice.

Wild beasts, controlled by the magnetic power of the Magi, rolled in luxurious ease on silken rugs; the great tables gleamed with jewelled goblets and golden dishes; a thousand instruments mingled with the clamor of a thousand tongues; waves of intoxicating perfumes were wafted up from vaults beneath the palace; myriads of lamps winked and blazed from roof and walls and pillars. At intervals a dancer would float out on to the great white marble circle of floor, round which the tables were grouped, veiled only in her cloud of hair, and moving like a blown leaf before the wind would draw an outburst of applause that set the great beasts roaring until the domed hall rang.

Vast, sinister, marvellous as the dreams of a hashish-eater, the long orgy at last drew to an end. The revellers lay back amidst their cushions, while Prince Dena rose from his place and led Evadne to the center of the enclosed circle.

He held up a hand, and silence fell over the entire multitude of feasters; not even a beast but seemed suddenly turned to a lifeless statue.

Sir Hugh Willett and Hadur, who had sat watchful and silent during the long revel, eating only enough to give them strength, and drinking no wine, looked up with tightening nerves as the destined Bride stood facing the vast assembly.

A single garment of marvellously-wrought gold tissue outlined her lovely slenderness. Her shining head was bound with a richly jewelled circlet of gold, and over her eyes its clasp glittered bright and evil in the myriads of lamps. So brilliant were the gems that formed this clasp that it had all the effect of a living flame, and Sir Hugh shuddered as he saw the hateful familiar symbol of Melek Taos flash, and flash again above Evadne's dreaming misted eyes.

"The Hour is at hand!" The High Priest's ringing tones pierced even the wine-sodden senses of the revellers. "This is my Hour, my Hour of love, my Hour of fulfilment, the Hour of mystic communion with Melek Taos, when he in me, and I in him, rejoice in the Bride!

"Follow!" he continued, turning his burning gaze around the entire circle. "Follow, that you may worship at the great altar of Melek Taos; that you may see the Angel Peacock descend in living Fire—awful, transcendent, inexplicable! Follow! The Hour is come!"

"Not yet, not yet!" whispered Hadur in anguished appeal, as his companion gathered himself up for attack. "You may destroy her body and soul if you strike too soon. It must be done before the altar."

But, crazed with the torture of long imaginings, Sir Hugh was deaf to Hadur's pleading. He snatched up a long curved knife from a table and rushed across the marble floor with a swift silent ferocity that came within an ace of success. A black panther, however, lolling at ease within that circle, saw the flying figure and sprang like an arrow from a mighty bow. Man and beast together rolled at the feet of the High Priest, gleaming fang and gleaming knife matched in a death struggle.

The High Priest smiled. Evadne stared

with a heart-breaking blankness in her eyes. The revellers stood up, cheering and laughing. The other beasts drew near, their heads flattened, their tails switching slowly. There was a fierce prolonged snarl, a choking cough, and the panther suddenly lay very still, a pool of blood spreading over the white marble floor.

Sir Hugh staggered to his feet, and advanced, with his dripping knife still clasped in one shaking hand, his eyes on his dreaming, spellbound wife. The High Priest smiled again, stretching out one jewelled forefinger toward the dishevelled figure.

Instantly the lamp-flames, from end to end of that vast room, flared up to the very roof; a peal of thunder shook the crystal goblets and golden dishes from the tables; the beasts cowered in abject terror; and Sir Hugh, as if struck by some terrible force, was sent hurtling and crashing across the floor to Hadur's side, where he lay limp as a half-emptied sack of meal.

With loud drunken laughter, the feasters turned to follow Prince Dena, in his black and scarlet robes, with a five-pointed star—the Seal of Solomon—fastened in the silken folds of his turban, and the symbol of Melek Taos in rubies on his breast.

Hadur half carried, half dragged the semi-conscious Sir Hugh after the laughing, intoxicated crowd. Down endless corridors and flights of steps they went, until they reached the great vaulted chambers beneath the palace; and thence a subterranean passage cut from the solid rock led to the immense vaults beneath the temple. From one cave-like chamber to another the High Priest led the silent, lovely Bride.

The cooler air revived Sir Hugh. He leaned less heavily on Hadur, and breathed more easily.

"Where is she? Where is she?" he asked hoarsely.

"There, walking ahead of us!"

The Prince was leading Evadne up a long flight of steps, the crowd at their heels. Hadur and Sir Hugh, now almost himself again, began to push through the drunken, indifferent mob. They were not far from the leaders of it, when a brilliant light broke up the vaulted darkness, and Hadur whispered:

"The Red Altar of Melek Taos!"

They had arrived at the top of the steps, where a row of huge squat pillars stood outlined against a crimson glare from within. The two passed between the pillars and found themselves in a colossal underground chapel, whose walls and floor and roof gleamed in brilliant fiery scarlet. After the long dark passages, with their few lamps, it was some minutes before they could get a clear impression of their surroundings.

Pillars ran along three sides of the chapel, with torches fastened to them. In the fourth wall an immense shrine was hollowed out, running deeply back, and sunk in a semi-circular basin below the level of the floor. In the center of the shrine stood a figure of some insoluble glittering metal, half man, half bird, its head crowned, its wings outspread and curved before its body; its hands and arms were human, its legs scaled and ending in monstrous claws.

From the hollowed base, on every side of the figure, rose luminous, blue-tipped Fire. With the roar of many waters, the incandescent sheets of flame stretched up to lick the lofty roof. It burned with the hum and fierce song of ageless strength and mystery—unapproachable, irresistible, unconquerable Fire!

THE Prince looked at the Bride he had brought to the sacrifice—the proud, shining head, the marvellous tender beauty of eyes and molded lips, the slender matchless symmetry of limbs and body, but above all the spark in her of that divine fire that did not fail or die before the source of its inspiration. Never before had the High Priest brought a Bride to the Altar of Melek Taos without seeing her beauty dwindle and become as insignificant as that of a mere painted doll.

His breath quickened. He watched her, fascinated, unbelieving, incredulous that any woman could stand in the terrible brilliance of that borrowed Fire from heaven and draw from it an added glory to herself. He stepped back to watch her, to engrave on his memory the image of this perfect Bride, before he broke the lovely mold and offered it here on the great Altar.

The roystering mob was awed by the sublime spectacle before them. They drew back toward the walls, back from that unleashed quivering force, the naked pure element from which all life sprang, and to which all life must finally return. They blinked afraid, ashamed, knowing themselves for beasts, and less than beasts, before that clean and living flame.

Evadne stood silent and enthralled by the edge of the fountain of Fire. By her side Prince Dena waited, enthralled also by the unexpected sublimity of this Hour of Love, the radiant figure of the golden Bride appearing as the very spirit of the Fire itself. A passion of desire rose in him, as swift, as fierce, as all-devouring as the lightnings that he gathered in the hollow of his hand.

For the first time he regretted the exigencies of his office as High Priest, and the necessity of yielding up that fair and lovely body to the fiery embrace of Melek Taos after his one brief Hour of love.

He made an impatient gesture to his Magi, as a sign that they should perform their usual duties. They made the sevenfold obeisance, and moved about the chapel to extinguish the torches and spread a thick carpet of crimson rose petals before the Altar. The Prince stood with eyes on Evadne, oblivious to the rest.

Sir Hugh and Hadur edged nearer and nearer to the Altar. No one prevented them, or noticed them at all, and they bided their time watchfully. Hadur whispered low and earnestly to his companion, under cover of the deep humming song of the Fire, and the latter listened with a faint gleam of hope in his eyes. He did not understand the full extent of the plan suggested, he did not realize what Hadur's rôle was to be. Nor did Hadur mean him to understand.

To save Evadne was the one thought that dominated them both. Sir Hugh was in no state of mind to worry about details. There seemed a last chance—he would take it!

"El mektoub, mektoub!" murmured Hadur to himself, and watched Evadne with eyes that took a long farewell.

PRINCE DENA advanced to the Altar, leading Evadne by the hand, and standing before the fire-encircled image of Melek Taos, he cried:

"O Master, behold the Bride!"

The Fire sank down to the floor at his clarion call, seeming to abase itself at the feet of the great Magus who could command it.

"O mighty One! O Melek Taos! O Ruler of Earth!
Bend from thy throne to accept this sacrifice.
In mystic communion do thou live in me, as I in thee!
The Hour is mine! The Hour is thine!
The Joy is mine! The Joy is thine!
Be that which thou art, and thou shalt be!
Cover me with the splendor of Eloim and Ischim!

By the Very Voice of Fire, I hail thee, Bright Spirit!
Melek Taos! Melek Taos! Melek Taos! El Vay!"

At the last word the Fire sprang fiercer and brighter than before. The hum of the flames became a triumphant song.

The High Priest turned his back to the Altar and faced the people.

"Open the doors, O Magi! And ye, worshippers at the shrine, depart and leave me to my Hour! When that is passed"—the voice of Prince Dena sank to its deepest note, his burning eyes veiled for a moment by their heavy lids—"then ye shall return to witness the sacrifice. In the name of Melek Taos, I bid thee go."

Hadur and Sir Hugh were now very close to the Altar. They stood tensed in every muscle, while the crowd about them streamed toward the open doors.

The High Priest stood with eyes on Evadne, enchanted, utterly oblivious to all else. He took one step toward her. It was his last.

He never knew who seized him in arms of steel, hurling him back to that sea of living flame, over the edge of the sunken Altar, into the heart of the singing incandescent Fire!

A long shivering moan rose from the people, as Hadur, with Prince Dena in his arms, rolled over into the triumphant leaping flames. For a brief moment a blinding glare filled the cavernous chapel to its farthermost corner as the Fire curled and roared over its two victims, turning them to mere blackened shells in a few awful moments. Total darkness followed. Not a flicker, not a vestige of the Altar Fire lit the gloom.

Stumbling forward with a great cry, Sir Hugh found Evadne clinging to him, crying, trembling, broken, helpless as a child. Taking her in his arms, he staggered on blindly. Cries and groans sounded on every hand.

How he found the entrance he never knew, but he reached it at last, and followed the subterranean passages, where not one single lamp gleamed now, until a draft of fresher air guided him to a door opening on the courtyard of the Palace.

The place was desolate and silent. The guards, on this night of feasting, lay in drunken sleep across the threshold of the gates.

Down the cliff path the fugitives stumbled, and found the car still standing in the valley. To his intense relief and surprize, Sir Hugh found it answered to his touch, and they reached Port Said safely a few days later.

They never returned to the East. Evadne's vague memories, and Sir Hugh's vivid ones, as well as their sorrow for Hadur's death, robbed the Orient of all its color and romance for both of them, for ever.

The Ravening Monster

By HAROLD WARD

A shuddery story about an electrocuted murderer who was raised from the dead and revivified

THE condemned man raised his bloodshot eyes and glared at the newcomer angrily.

"You another lousy preacher?" he snarled. "Get the hell out of here!"

"Better come outside, sir, and talk to him through the bars," the guard whispered. "He's bad."

The fat man silenced him with a gesture.

"I've something for Mr. Fisher's ear alone," he answered calmly. Then, as the guard closed the cell door and stepped back out of hearing: "No, Fisher, I'm not a preacher. I care not a tinker's damn about the condition of your soul. It is your body that I want." His voice dropped to a husky whisper. "They are going to burn you in the morning. They'll fry you until your insides shrivel up like bacon in a pan. They'll——"

The murderer's fingers, stubby, gnarled, twisted and untwisted like a den of snakes.

"I could choke hell out of you before the screws could get to you," he said speculatively. "I've a notion to try it. Fat men are easy to kill. They haven't any wind and——"

The newcomer shrugged his shoulders.

"We haven't time to argue the matter," he smiled, stroking his long, white beard. He spoke with just a trace of German accent. "We will assume that you are correct in your statement," he went on. "Now give me five minutes to tell you my story."

He leaned forward so that his voice would not carry outside the cell.

"I can save you, man! There is one chance in a million for you to cheat death. One chance in a million to keep that soul of yours out of hell's fire. Do you want to take that chance or do you intend letting the law take its course?"

Fisher raised his matted head.

"Say, bo, are you tryin' to kid me?" he growled. He pounded his thick chest like a gorilla. "I'm bad, I am. I—but what's the proposition?"

The fat man chuckled. He leaned forward again and tapped the other's knee with his pudgy forefinger.

"Just this," he whispered. "As I told you a moment ago, they will shoot three jolts of electricity into you in the morning. Everything that's inside of you will be burned to a crisp—heart, liver, lungs, intestines—everything. I'm a doctor; I know. I'm an experimenter—a scientist. My colleagues at the university where I once taught claimed that I was crazy—crazy because I dared think in advance of the times. Many's the time I have seen them tap their brows when they thought my head was turned. Now here's the proposition in a nutshell: I want your body. You can sign a paper that I've prepared instructing the authorities to give it to me after they have wreaked their vengeance on you. You have no relatives to put in a prior claim. If I can get you before *rigor mortis* sets in I believe—believe, I say, for I do not want to deceive you—that I can, by grafting within your body the viscera of one of the lower animals—a dog, for instance—bring you

back to life again. The chance is, as I told you, one in a million that I will succeed. But you can afford to take that chance, for you will be dead in any event —so dead that the maggots will be crawling between your ribs within a month."

He chuckled huskily to himself. The murderer shrank back against the wall.

"Shut up, damn you!" he growled. "I'm human, I am, even if I am a damned killer."

The fat man chuckled again.

"I thought that remark about the maggots would put some life into you," he answered. "That's what they call psychology, my friend. As for you being a human being, I doubt it. The papers refer to you as 'The Beast' because of your brutality. You've wallowed in blood —innocent blood. You've killed because you like to see people suffer—just as a bad boy tortures a butterfly by sticking pins into it. You like to see people twist and squirm and writhe under your cruel grasp. You love the smell of rich, fresh blood. You are an atavism—a reversion to some prehistoric type. All in all, you are the most brutal killer in the history of crime——"

The condemned man squared his shoulders proudly.

"That's me," he chortled. "I've made a name for myself—a name that people won't forget for a while. Did you see what the papers wrote about me? They said that I——"

The fat man stopped him with a gesture.

"My name is Kritz," he interrupted. "I've got a dog that I've been working with. He's ready for the experiment. He is the same sort of dog that you are a man. He, too, is a throwback—a wolf-dog—a wild animal with slavering jaws and greenish-yellow, bloodshot eyes. He's an outcast among dogs, feared and hated by all of his kind. Even his ancestors, the wolves, would have nothing to do with him in the days when he ran wild. He's a killer, too—the sort of killer that sneaks up from behind and strikes without warning. It's his viscera that I intend to graft into your body. If I succeed, I——"

"He threw up his arm, and his finger involuntarily pressed the trigger."

He stopped suddenly and, leaning forward, dropped his voice even lower than before.

"If I succeed, you can kill again," he whispered. "You can satiate yourself with blood—wallow in it—wade in it up to your ankles. No one will be the wiser. For Fisher, the murderer, will be dead. See? In his place will be a new man. But come, the guard grows uneasy. What do you say?"

The killer's eyes were gleaming balefully. They were the eyes of a man who has been drugged. His face twisted and writhed. His teeth gnashed together like those of a wild animal. His voice trembled as he stretched forth his hand.

"Blood! Blood!" he whispered, half to himself. "The chance to kill again. The chance to feel warm flesh beneath my fingers once more and hear the gurgle of the dying. Give me the paper, man! Call in a couple of screws to witness it when I sign. And then—then get out. Get out before I choke you. I—God! God, how I love blood!"

2

DAWN. A small, whitewashed room, bare save for the curiously constructed chair with innumerable straps and wires attached which stood on a slightly raised platform in the center of the floor and the dozen rude benches surrounding it. On them sat men conversing in low whispers.

"The poor devil don't even know his own name," one of the newspaper men whispered to the man at his side. "They say that he was conked by a bit of shrapnel over in France. Been balmy ever since. But nobody knows for certain. Somebody called him John Fisher and the name stuck."

"He sure as thunder is a bloodthirsty wretch," the other answered. "I covered that story of his capture. He cleaned up on two coppers when the posse cornered him in the cornfield after he'd killed old man Dickinson and his wife with a hatchet. He's a mental case. Government ought to take care of him."

"Can't prove service connection. Nobody to front for him at the Veterans' Bureau. Cheaper a damn sight for the state to fry him than stick him into the nut-house. He——"

The entrance of the warden brought conversation to a sudden stop.

The official held up his hand protestingly.

"Please stop smoking, gentlemen. Remember, you are here to witness an execution, not a theatrical performance. A man is about to meet his Maker."

Somebody tittered. He stopped suddenly as the door opened again and the condemned man was brought in. There was a dazed look on his wolfish face. On either side walked a guard. A black-robed priest walked ahead of him chanting a paternoster from a black-bound book.

He snarled like a caged animal as they shoved him into the chair and commenced adjusting the straps. Leaning forward, he sank his teeth into the hand of one of the guards. The man jerked away with a muttered oath. A newspaper man giggled. The warden frowned.

The guards stepped back with a slight nod to the warden. He held up his hand. The witnesses leaned forward. The man in the chair strained jerkily at his bonds, then dropped back. There was a slight smell of burning flesh. . . .

3

DAWN again. In a huge room in a great, ramshackle house set in the midst of a dark forest a white-aproned, pot-bellied man with long, white whis-

kers worked feverishly over an operating-table. The odor of carbolic acid and disinfectants filled the air.

The old man straightened his tired back and, laying a brightly polished instrument upon the porcelain-topped table beside him, turned to the girl who was acting as his assistant.

"We win, Greta, my daughter!" he cried exultingly, removing his rubber gloves and throwing them atop the table. "He will live!"

The girl dropped into a chair, her face white and drawn.

"God, Father, but I'm tired!" she exclaimed. "Eighteen hours without food or water. And, even if we have won, what does it all amount to?"

The old man's eyes burned with a fanatical light.

"My colleagues at the university—they called me crazy!" he snarled. "Crazy—me, Alexander Kritz—because I dared to think in advance of them. This man will prove to them whether or not I am insane. But, no—I can not proclaim my story to the world because he is a criminal. In bringing him back to life we have helped cheat the law. Therefore we might be forced to pay the penalty. But, my girl, we have the satisfaction of knowing that we have done that which no other human has ever done before. The organism of the dog still palpitates with life—throbs within the body of the man. Absolute quiet for weeks until every union has grown together. Think of it! Soon the rich, warm blood will be pulsating through the veins again—the veins that the law destroyed. Think of it, girl! Think of it! *The dead will walk again!*"

He dropped into a chair beside the one occupied by his daughter and closed his weary eyes.

4

THE rain was coming down in torrents. Ted Tucker, attorney at law, glanced down at his gas gage and turned the car in to a filling-station at the outskirts of the village. The attendant, clad in slicker and high rubber boots, gave him such attention as he required.

"Hell of a night," the native remarked as he rubbed a chamois skin over the windshield. "Goin' far?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll tell you when you've told me something," he answered. "Where does Professor Alexander Kritz live? I understand that it's somewhere close by."

The attendant looked at him queerly. For an instant he made no reply as he slowly counted out the change for a two-dollar bill and passed it back to the other.

"You a friend of his?" he demanded, a peculiar expression creeping over his weather-beaten face.

"Hardly that," the lawyer answered. "I'm his attorney."

"Oh," the attendant grunted, leaning his arm atop the open window. "Peculiar old cuss, ain't he?"

Tucker shook his head.

"I've never met him," he answered. "What sort of man is he?"

The native hesitated.

"Folks hereabouts don't like him," he said finally. "No one ever goes there. When he first arrived he made it known that he didn't want company. Comes in to town occasionally to buy his grub, pays cash for it and goes on about his business. The girl's just as bad. She's a pretty little thing and she's got a nice car—buys gas here occasionally—but when some of the boys tried to shine up to her she cut 'em cold. They say that they've got a half-wit livin' there, too. Maybe he's a relative and they're sort of 'shamed of him. They live in the old

Priestly house a couple of miles back in the woods. Foller the pavement straight ahead till you hit a road leadin' in through the woods—graveled. Take it till you come to a road to the right. 'Taint much of a road, but you can get through it with the power you've got. It leads right up to the house. It's a big, tumbledown affair."

The lawyer nodded and pressed his foot against the starter. The attendant stepped back as if to close the conversation. Then, as if struck by a thought, he stepped forward again.

"There's been a lot of peculiar carryings-on hereabouts," he said soberly. "You're a stranger, so I'd best warn you. Jim Peasley was killed a while back—throat ripped all to the devil like a wild beast had done it. Few nights later Lizzie Mumsley, ol' Miss Dixon's hired girl, she got it the same way. Throat chawed and torn. Sheriff had a posse searchin' around, but they haven't found nothing. Lot of stock killed, too. Better watch your step, mister."

He stuck his head in through the open window of the car and lowered his voice.

"A lot of folks blame Kritz, although I don't see what he's got to do with it. But people will talk, you know."

Tucker displayed the handle of a revolver stuck in the side pocket of his raincoat.

"I'm from Chicago," he bragged. "In there we have guns to cut our teeth on when we are babies. Even the nursing-bottles are made to look like machine-guns. I can take care of myself, but thanks just the same."

The station attendant shrugged his shoulders and turned back into the warmth and security of his little station.

The lights of the machine brought out a side road leading off from the pavement. Tucker slowed down. Graveled though it was, it looked little better than a track rambling through the foliage of two hills. He turned onto it. The headlights showed up every hole in the gravel, every tiny pond of water, every shadowy stone, making them look more dangerous than they really were. The lightning flashed incessantly, intermingled with the steady rumble of thunder. In spite of the windshield-wiper, he was forced to travel at a snail's pace.

Ahead of him was the wood. The jagged flashes of lightning which constantly split the sky brought out every tree and bush in bold relief. The headlights showed the side road turning off from the graveled thoroughfare. He cautiously turned his machine onto it. It was muddy and rough, but, as the oil station attendant had said, he negotiated it with little trouble, although he little more than crept along.

The storm was increasing in fury every minute. The rattle of the rain upon the top of the car and the steady rumble of the thunder made a medley of sound in which the exhaust of his engine took no small part. The temperature was dropping steadily. He recollected too late that the heater was disconnected. He was benumbed—half frozen.

The lane—it was little more than a tunnel through the trees, so heavy was the foliage—twisted sharply to the left. Ahead of him loomed a huge pile of masonry. The headlights played over the wet, vine-covered stone; it looked like an Old World castle. One window only showed a light; it was dim and blurred as if the shade had been pulled tightly against the flash.

He turned his spotlight against the door. Finally he located it—a huge affair of dark wood at the end of a flagstone path edged with bushes and weeds. The whole place, seen through the darkness and rain, had a distinct air of bleak-

ness and inhospitality. He put it down to the storm and, climbing stiffly out of the car, faced the fury of the elements. Outside the car he found the tumult was worse than he had expected. The force of the wind fairly lifted him off his feet. The night was filled with the constant rumble of the thunder, and the roar of the breeze through the trees combined with the ceaseless downpour of the rain. The sky was torn by incessant flashes of lightning. In spite of the raincoat he was soaked by the time he negotiated the narrow path to the door.

A man leaped out of the shadow of the bushes and cautiously approached. He was almost upon the lawyer. The latter caught a glimpse of him as an unusually bright stroke of lightning split the heavens—a glimpse of a hairy face, of gleaming, bloodshot eyes, of lips drawn back over gleaming teeth in a wolfish snarl.

"Are you——"

The man leaped back. An instant later he was swallowed up by the blackness of the forest.

5

TUCKER shuddered. Turning, he brought his knuckles against the panel. There was no answer. Cursing under his breath, he beat his fist against the wood again and again. From inside came a peculiar clomp-clomp-clomp. Suddenly it ceased. He could feel—actually feel—that some one was standing on the other side of the door listening. Angrily, he brought his knuckles against the door again.

"Who is it?" a quavering voice demanded. It was not the palsied quaver of an old person, but, rather, the trembling voice of some one in mortal terror.

"Tucker!" he answered above the crash and tumult of the storm. "Is this the residence of Professor Alexander Kritz?"

For a moment there was no reply. Then a chain rattled and a bolt was drawn from its hasp. The door was pulled back a tiny crack and an eye peered through the opening.

"Who did you say it was?" the fear-laden voice demanded again.

"Tucker!" the lawyer roared, thoroughly angry by this time. "If you are Professor Kritz, then I am the lawyer you telegraphed for this morning. I am a member of the firm of Tucker and Wakeman. My partner, Mr. Wakeman, was unable to come. If you are not Professor Kritz, then I will be on my way and to hell with you. I don't intend to stand out here in this storm all night debating the question."

The man on the other side muttered something. Then the door was slowly drawn back far enough for the visitor to squeeze through the opening, only to be slammed shut again with force enough to jar the house. The bolt was slipped back into its hasp and the chain snapped into place. The lawyer brushed the water from his eyes and stood staring at a fat man dressed in an ancient dressing-gown—a man slightly past middle age, with long, white whiskers, and beady eyes that blinked at him through thick-lensed glasses. He was walking on crutches, which accounted for the clomping sound. In his right hand he held a huge revolver with which he covered his visitor threateningly, balancing himself on the crutches, one foot held several inches above the floor.

"Do you always receive your visitors this way?" Tucker demanded.

The fat man stuck the weapon into the folds of his gown and extended a hand for him to shake—a flabby, fish-like hand covered with red hair and stained with chemicals.

"I must beg your pardon, sir," he said finally, gazing at the newcomer from under his shaggy brows. "I—well, to be honest, I had expected to see Wakeman and I—I am in danger here. Mortal danger. God alone knows what danger I am in."

He hesitated. Then:

"That is why I did not let you in immediately," he went on. "I am forced to maintain a veritable fortress here."

The lawyer nodded comprehendingly. *"Come to me at once,"* the message had said. *"Please do not delay. It is a matter of life and death."*

"Mr. Wakeman was taken suddenly ill," he answered soberly. "Otherwise he would have responded in person to your wire. In view of the fact that you seemed in extreme haste, he believed it better to send me than to wait until he was recovered."

Kritz shrugged his fat shoulders. Turning, he led the way down a narrow, bare hall lighted by a single kerosene bracket lamp. Suddenly he stopped and, turning to the other, dropped his voice to a husky whisper.

"Did you see anything when you came in?" he questioned. "Or hear anything—unusual?"

The lawyer nodded briefly.

"A man. He dodged out of the bushes at my approach. For an instant I thought that he meant to attack me, or speak to me. Then, as I turned, he dodged back into the forest. Why? I had heard that you had a—well, a man with you who was slightly off and——"

Kritz halted him with that peculiar gesture of his.

"Never mind," he said bruskly. "I will explain later."

He led his visitor to a door and, turning the knob, ushered him inside. Tucker rightly surmised that it was through the window of this room that the light had filtered, for a huge desk lamp illuminated all of the vast interior. A partition wall had been torn out between two large rooms, the result being a vast space filled almost to overflowing with books and laboratory apparatus. The walls were lined with heavy tomes. In a distant corner was a sink in front of which stood a porcelain-topped table. Several shelves were laden with bottles and retorts and other chemical paraphernalia.

TUCKER removed his sodden coat and hat at a sign from Kritz and threw them across a chair. Indicating another, the fat man motioned his visitor to be seated. He was about to seat himself on the other side of the desk, when he suddenly recollected himself.

"In my excitement I forget my duties as host," he apologized. "You have not yet dined?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"I did not stop because of the storm," he answered.

Kritz picked up his crutches and started toward the door.

"Your pardon, sir," he exclaimed. "I will summon Greta, my daughter, and ask her to prepare a lunch and some hot coffee. You will need it after your soaking. We live alone, Greta and I, because of the confidential nature of my experiments. She is my assistant."

He hobbled another step toward the door, then stopped again.

"One question," he said suddenly. "It is a question which may require some thought on your part before it is answered—and it is necessary that it be answered immediately. I know little or nothing of the laws of your country. What is the penalty for bringing a man back from the grave—a man who has been killed by the law—executed?"

Tucker stared at him blankly.

"I—I don't believe that I quite understand you," he said finally.

"Suppose that I create a man—suppose that I take a dead body after the law has wreaked its vengeance upon it and into that bit of cold clay I again place life? Suppose that I find that I have created a Frankenstein monster—a menace to society? Have I the right, as its creator, to kill it? Or must I turn it over to the law once more? And if I do turn it over to the law, what is the penalty I must pay for thwarting the law's vengeance?"

The lawyer scratched his head dumbly. Was the man insane? No sane man would ask such a question.

"Your question is more for a priest than for a lawyer," he answered to gain time. "On the other hand——"

He stopped suddenly. From outside the window came a peculiar scratching sound. It was like that of a cat clawing against the side of the house or sharpening its claws on the soft, pine sash.

Kritz jerked the revolver from his pocket and cocked it, his hand trembling like a leaf in the wind.

"There it is!" he whispered huskily. "That is Fisher—the beast—the thing that I am talking about."

Then came a howl—a long, shrieking, quivering howl. It was the howl of a wolf that has scented fresh blood. Kritz cowered against the wall, his fat body shaking like that of a man with the palsy.

It ceased suddenly. Above the noise and crash and tumult of the storm could be heard the sound of running feet—of unshod feet. Pad-pad-pad, it rounded the house.

A hand was laid softly on the door at the end of the hall and the knob was turned gently. Then came a puppyish whine—the begging whine of a young dog that has been locked out of its accustomed sleeping-place.

Then all was silent again.

6

For a moment neither man spoke. The old man had imparted some of his terror to his visitor. Finally, however, he straightened himself and shrugged his shoulders, although his teeth were still chattering like castanets.

"You—you understand—now," he said finally, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "You have seen him and now you—you have heard him. It's not like seeing an ordinary person. There's—there's a *feeling* about him—an undead feeling, if you understand what I mean. It is just lately that I've noticed him. I've never seen a ghost, Mr. Tucker. As a scientist, I've always scouted the idea of people coming back from the grave. But you get the same feeling from him that I imagine one would get from meeting a ghost—an unnatural feeling—a feeling of terror.

"And now," he went on, "I will get my daughter. She will come down and prepare something to eat. I dared not let her come downstairs before, crippled as I am and unable to defend her against this awful thing. I had a fall a few days ago and strained the ligaments of my leg."

The lawyer turned a white, strained face toward him.

"Sit down, man!" he exclaimed. "Sit down and tell me about it. What is this terror—this thing that is holding you in its grasp? True, I felt it, but yet I do not understand."

Kritz dropped his trembling form into a near-by chair.

"That's the hell of it, Tucker," he exclaimed. "I don't know. When the idea came to me, I imagined that I was doing

something wonderful for humanity—for science. Think of it, I said to myself—if I succeed there will be no need for death. One can keep going on and on and on. We worked, Greta and I, until we were ready to drop from exhaustion. You have heard of Fisher, the arch-murderer? Yes? Well, it was his body that I obtained from the prison authorities. He willed it to me. I promised to make him live again and I kept my word. Into his empty shell I grafted the viscera of a dog—the meanest, lowest, most vicious animal that I could find—a canine Fisher."

He stopped suddenly and, leaning forward, tapped the other's knee with his forefinger. His voice dropped to a hoarse whisper.

"Kish, the wolf-dog, accursed of his kind, now lives within the body of John Fisher, the murderer!"

"Impossible!" Tucker exclaimed.

"Is it?" Kritz demanded. "You have seen him. You have heard him sniffing at the window, seeking to gain an entrance. No, Tucker, it is not impossible. I am a creator—as great as God himself. Only, just as God created in the Devil a thing that he was unable to control, so have I created this monster and he has gotten beyond me.

"For weeks after the operation of joining the two bodies I kept him under the influence of a powerful anesthetic of my own compounding until every nerve and muscle and tissue knit together into a homogeneous whole. Heart, lungs—everything burned out by the powerful electric current—were removed. In their place I grafted the organs of Kish. Just as Burbank created his wonders of the plant world, so I created the wonder of the animal kingdom—a living being, half man, half dog.

"My great problem was to keep him quiet so that everything would knit together and, at the same time, keep dissolution from setting in. That is why I first compounded the anesthetic of which I spoke. And, too, I was obliged to use artificial respiration. It was not until two months had passed that I dared allow him to sit up and move of his own volition.

"Not until it was too late did I realize what I had done. He proved, at the end of the initial period, to be nothing but a mass of flesh and blood with apparently no brain. Of course, the electric current destroyed his brain cells. I attempted to graft a bit of gray matter from the skull of the dog onto his brain pan, but apparently without result. Yet there must have been a few cells that lived, since he talks after a fashion and, up to a certain point, is able to reason. I proved one thing conclusively; his skull had at one time been caved in. There must have been a pressure against his brain. That was probably what caused him to run amuck."

Again he filled and lighted his long, German pipe. Tucker felt in his pocket for a box of matches and a package of cigarettes. Lighting one, he leaned back in his chair and waited for the old man to continue.

Suddenly the pipe clattered to the floor as Kritz leaped to his feet and groped once more among the folds of his gown for the revolver.

"Listen!" he whispered hoarsely. "Hear him?"

Above the clamor and tumult of the storm came that peculiar puppyish whine again. Then the scratching at the window.

Kritz automatically jerked the trigger of his revolver. The leaden slug embedded itself harmlessly in the wall a foot to one side of the window.

A bestial growl! Then the sound of feet padding away in the distance.

A woman screamed.

"Father! Father! My God, what is it?"

The old man hobbled to the door.

"He—he was at the window again, Greta," he called up the stairway. "Have no fear. Mr. Tucker is with me."

TURNING back into the room, he reseated himself and picked up the pipe with trembling fingers.

"This—this sluggish mass of meat that I have stolen from the grave, Mr. Tucker, is—I hardly know how to describe him to you. He is neither man nor dog. God, what ugly beasts they both were! Fisher, a bloodthirsty butcher, a killer of the worst criminal type. A man devoid of fear, living only to shed blood. Even in the death cell he cursed and raved like a maniac when they went to lead him to the chair. He bit the hand of one of the guards and shrieked with pleasure, they say, at sight of the red blood. Once in his cell he struck a priest who attempted to console him. He went to his death with a vile oath on his lips. And Kish, the most vicious animal of the northland, hated by man and beast, half wolf, half dog—a slinking killer. . . .

"The union of the two of them is nothing but an inert gob of fat and muscle seemingly content to bask in the sun and blink his heavy eyes when any one comes near. But you have heard, my friend. He is not so dumb as he appears. But I digress."

He sucked meditatively at his pipe for a moment before continuing.

"Two months ago," he went on, "while I was in the village buying supplies I learned that one of the villagers had lost a valuable calf. He believed that a wild dog was running amuck. I paid little attention to his tale.

"Then a dozen sheep were killed in a near-by field. Next morning I noticed blood on Fisher's hands. And, too, there was a peculiar muttony odor on his clothes. I questioned him, but he only grinned back at me idiotically. Exasperated, I seized a whip and beat him. He merely cowered in a corner and howled like a little child. I threw down the whip, disgusted at myself. It was asinine to think that this brainless monstrosity had killed those animals! He was as dumb and harmless as a sheep himself. Yet the blood—it made me think.

"Next, a man was killed. His body was torn to bits and his throat cut and slashed. The farmers searched the countryside for traces of a wild animal—some ferocious beast that was doing the killing. They found nothing.

"But listen, my friend. Next morning when I went to the bowl to wash I found traces of blood on the sides. Fisher had learned his lesson. He was crafty. The beating I had given him when I found blood on his hands had taught him the lesson of cunning.

"I beat him again. I whipped him until the gore dripped in streams from the cuts across his back. He made no effort to fight back. I was still his master, see? He had not yet learned that I was weaker than he. That is true with all of the lower animals. In his half-witted way he tried to tell me that he had done nothing wrong. Again I was almost tempted to believe him—to believe that he was the victim of some strange chain of circumstances. For it is difficult, my friend, to conceive such a thing—an inert, sluggish mass of flesh and blood—a thing apparently contented to sit and stare aimlessly into vacancy—to believe that such a thing can be so clever—so diabolically cunning.

"Had I forgotten his record? you ask. No. But remember, Tucker, that Fisher, the arch-murderer, was dead—electrocuted. Out of his body and that of Kish, the wolf-dog, I had created this monstrosity. I had expected something different. And like all experimenters, when

an experiment turns out to be a failure, I threw the result aside. Fisher was a different sort of man from this thing—a wild animal, ferocious, a devil incarnate. Kish was of the same type, only there was a subtle streak in him. This thing of my creation had none of the characteristics of either. No, I could not believe that this stupid mass, even though a combination of the two, could be the soft-footed, quick-striking thing that was terrorizing the countryside."

Again he smoked a moment in silence. Then:

"It was the calendar that revealed the truth to me. One day I glanced at it idly. The thought flashed across my brain that the night the man was killed the moon had been dark. The night the sheep were killed there was no moon. The same thing was true the night the calf was slashed and torn and mangled.

"Some atavistic streak in Fisher—some throwback in Kish, the wolf-dog—when combined causes this thing I have created to run, to kill, to destroy only when there is no moon. Now do you understand?"

Tucker leaned forward, his face betraying the interest he felt.

"I think that I do," he answered. "It is your opinion, then, that——"

His cuff caught on the window-shade. The spring, released, shot the shade to the roller.

Pressed against the glass was a face—the face of a monster. Dark, hairy, with little eyes, bloodshot and glaring, the thick lips drawn back over yellowish teeth of enormous size, it was the face of a fiend out of hell. The rain-soaked hair was dripping and matted. The nose was flat, the nostrils of extraordinary size.

The lawyer leaped to his feet with a shriek. He jerked at the gun in his pocket and brought it to play on the window. But too late. The thing had disappeared. Again he heard the pad-pad-pad of feet in the distance. Then the dismal, wailing, wolf-like howl.

7

KRITZ, shaking like a wind-blown leaf, was still sitting in his chair as Tucker, stretching forth his arm, drew the shade down again.

"God! What a face!" he exclaimed. "It was the face of a devil, a gargoyle, a—a——"

He hesitated, at a loss for words. The old man took the sentence out of his mouth.

"The face of a thing made by human hands and not by the Creator," he said solemnly, stilling his chattering teeth for an instant. "I am glad, Mr. Tucker, that you have seen him again. The glimpse you had of him when you entered gave you no conception of what he is. You will understand my problem better now. Remember, too, that there is no moon tonight. That and the darkness and the storm is why he is—why he is as he is. Tomorrow, should the sun come out, he may be altogether different—a listless thing of almost inanimate flesh."

He picked up his pipe again and, filling it, stuffed the tobacco into the bowl with his fat forefinger, his eyes wearing a strained, far-away look. Finally, lighting it, he turned to the lawyer again.

"Since you have thus seen him, I will make the remainder of my story short. Suffice to say that his next victim was an innocent country girl. They found her mutilated body along the roadside. I will not go into the harrowing details. Again it was in the dark of the moon. Resolved to take no chances, I had locked him up. But he broke down the door and made his escape. Since then he has remained outside. The bit of brain inside his head tells him that he has done wrong. Time after time I have caught him prowling

about. But the streak of diabolical cunning in his makeup warns him that the revolver with which I have armed myself is dangerous and he takes no chances.

"Where does he hide? I do not know. It is seldom that he shows himself in the daytime. I have been living in a torment of fear, not only for myself, but also for Greta. Hurrying from one part of the house to another, I sprained my leg by falling. The injury made me more helpless than ever.

"I have had it in my mind to flee—to take my daughter and hasten to a place of safety, for I am certain that he intends to kill us both. Instinct tells him that I have done him an injury in bringing him back from the grave. How do I know this? That I can not tell, only I do know it. But is it right that I should go away and leave the devilish thing free to prey upon the unsuspecting country people? And I dare not tell them what and who he is for fear of the punishment they will mete out to me for bringing such a monster into their midst."

He stretched forth his hand appealingly.

"I know so little of the law, Mr. Tucker. My entire life has been devoted to scientific pursuits. What can they do to me for bringing this arch-fiend—this man killed by the law of the land—back to life?"

Tucker hesitated. Kritz waited an instant, then went on.

"That is why I sent the wire to Wakeman. He has always transacted my business for me. It was he who purchased this tumbledown house for me in order that I might carry on my experiments in seclusion.

"This morning a hunter passed through the woods. He had several dogs with him. Fisher kept out of sight. I took a chance and, opening the door, hailed the fellow. I gave him a dollar and asked him to send a message to Wakeman. He looked at me queerly when he read what I had written and acted as if he doubted my sanity. I forced a laugh and told him that the message was in code—that the words had no meaning to any one who did not have the key. He went on his way, apparently satisfied.

"Fisher came out of the bushes where he had been hiding and started stalking the man. His teeth were bared and his lips were flecked with foam. I thought for a moment that he was about to leap upon the poor devil. I was on the verge of shouting a warning. I had never seen him—the beast—act that way in the daytime before. It was the blood lust, I imagine—or he was hungry. I should have told the hunter—called his attention to the thing that was sneaking up behind him. He would have shot in self-defense and my problem would have been solved. But something held me back. Then it was too late, for the sight of the dogs drove the devilish thing back to cover and the hunter went on his way without knowing the dreadful peril that had threatened him."

He stopped again, licking his parched lips with his moist tongue.

"I forget my duties as host," he apologized. "I will call Greta at once. She will make some coffee and arrange a lunch for you. It will do you good after the soaking you have been through. I will be gone but a short time, but I must remain with her in the kitchen. I—I dare not leave her there alone."

He stopped suddenly. From outside came a shrieking laugh—a wild, maniacal howl of glee. It rose above the noise and tumult of the storm, ending in a wild, animal-like screech—the call of a wolf that scents its kill.

Then again silence. Ominous, portentous silence broken only by the steady

downpour of the rain and the rumble of the thunder.

8

TUCKER heard the girl come running down the stairs in response to her father's call. That she had been waiting for the summons was apparent. Then he heard the kitchen stove being stirred into life and the clatter of dishes.

There was a sudden crash. The tinkle of broken glass. A scream of mortal agony. The dull roar of a revolver. A woman's shrill scream again; it was cut off in the middle.

Again that shrieking, maniacal laugh, then the wolfish howl. This time it was the howl of the wolf that has made its kill and is sating itself in fresh, warm blood.

Tucker leaped to his feet, his hair rising like the quills of a porcupine. He jerked his automatic from his pocket. A single bound took him to the door. Opening it, he stepped out into the hall.

Silence. Silence save for the howling of the storm and the machine-gun patter of the rain as it beat against the roof. A draft swept through the narrow passageway; the bracket lamp guttered and smoked. Its flickering caused fantastic shadows to leap and dance upon the plastered walls.

For an instant he stopped and listened, his heart beating like a trip-hammer. Far in the rear was an open door. He approached it on tiptoe. Through it came a feeble, flickering light. He stopped just outside. Again that sinister silence. Then a dull, throaty, bestial growl—the growl of a wild animal that is worrying its prey and defies interference.

He leaped through the opening. The scene etched itself upon his brain with photographic clearness. The window broken; the glass scattered upon the floor. Through the opening the wind howled and roared and the rain splattered. A table covered with partly filled dishes. Upon it a glass, kerosene lamp, its chimney knocked off and broken, the pieces scattered over the oilcloth-covered table-top and upon the rough board floor. A huge cook stove in which a wood fire spit and crackled in emulation of the storm outside. The stove door was open; the dancing flames cast a mellow glow over the whole interior.

Just inside the door lay Kritz. His crutches were by his side. His fat, chemical-stained fingers grasped the handle of his revolver. His throat was torn. From his jugular vein spurted a stream of blood; his massive body lay in a great, ever-widening pool of it; his long, white whiskers were smeared with it. His eyes, wide open, stared up through the thick lenses of his spectacles like bits of dull agate.

On the other side of the room lay a girl. In life she must have been beautiful. Now her clothes were torn. The white, smooth flesh of her body was bruised and mangled.

Over her crouched a monster—a sodden man-beast with long, black, matted hair and tangled beard. He was clad only in undershirt and overalls; from them the water dripped in a glistening flood to mingle with the crimson on the floor. He was barefooted, bareheaded. His sharp fangs were buried in the rounded throat of the girl, while fom his lips came the dull, bestial growl that Tucker had heard before.

The monster raised his shaggy head and glared at the newcomer. Tucker involuntarily noted the wound in the other's shoulder where Kritz's bullet had found its mark. From it the blood was oozing down over the front of his wet, dirty shirt.

For an instant neither of them made a move. Tucker was benumbed with fear. On all fours the beast backed away from his prey. His blood-stained lips were drawn back over his yellowed fangs. From the corners of his mouth drooled a slaver. His long fingers worked spasmodically. He gathered himself for a spring.

The lawyer tried to raise his gun. His arms were leaden, he was hypnotized. The thing crept toward him. From his throat came a queer, whining noise, half yelp, half growl. Suddenly he launched himself.

The lawyer threw up his arm to protect his face. At the same time his finger involuntarily pressed the trigger. He saw the flame spurt from the muzzle of his gun. Then the huge body landed. He felt fingers feeling for his throat. They closed over his windpipe in a throttling grasp. He went down in a heap. . . .

Then came oblivion.

When Tucker opened his eyes the storm was still howling and raging. There was a weight upon his legs. By the light of the dancing fire he saw that it was the body of the monster. He dragged himself from beneath it. The shaggy, ill-shaped head was twisted to one side. Between the eyes was a small, round, blue-black hole edged with crimson.

The body of Kritz lay where it had fallen, only now the jaw had dropped and the features had relaxed into a sardonic grin as if the whole terrible affair were a great joke. Across the room the girl stared glassily ceilingward.

He leaped to his feet and ran shrieking from the accursed place.

His car was where he had left it. Bareheaded, coatless, the rain smashing down on him in a veritable cloudburst, he jerked open the door and, leaping inside, jammed his foot upon the starter. He was still screaming hysterically as he twisted the wheel to the right with all his strength and threw in the clutch. The machine leaped ahead as if it, too, shared the terror of the night.

The heavens were torn with the fury of the elements. Close behind him something crashed. The odor of sulfur was wafted to his nostrils. Upon his windshield was reflected a great light. He turned his head. The lightning had struck the old house and the flames were mounting toward the sky.

He turned the corner onto the graveled road and fled through the darkness and the storm like a man accursed.

The Sheraton Mirror

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

The story of a strange and unearthly revenge accomplished from beyond the grave

BECAUSE the letter was addressed to all of them, Miss Melora, who was oldest, opened it. "Why, it's from a lawyer," she said. "Talliaferro, from a lawyer!"

Talliaferro Pepperall nodded. "What does it say?" he asked.

Miss Tallulah, who had picked up the envelope, looked at the postmark and said, "From Wisconsin. Most likely Aunt Hattie's died—she's been sick long enough."

"Oh, that's what it is," said Miss Melora. "And what do you think," she went on, looking at Talliaferro over the letter, "she's left us the house, and everything!"

Miss Tallulah gasped, then began to chuckle. "Think of it, she hating us so all these years and then leaving us everything!"

Talliaferro took out a snuff-box and opened it gravely. "Seems likely they'd be a catch in that somewhere. You've read it carefully, have you, Melora?"

Melora looked at the letter again and said, "We have to live there—that's all, it seems." Her brow puckered a little, then cleared again. "And that wouldn't be bad, would it, Talliaferro? We could get a good price for this place, too, and we have been in New Orleans for such a long time now. It would be good to go north for a little."

"Oh, but the letter says, 'to take up residence for the rest of your natural lives'—and we hope that won't be a little," said Talliaferro, who had taken the letter from his sister's hand and was now reading it carefully.

Tallulah said, "Shall we go, or not? Seems we might as well. With all her money, we'll be a good deal more comfortable than we are now."

Melora added, "We could even afford a maid, and perhaps a butler, Talliaferro."

Talliaferro Pepperall hesitated. "I don't like it," he said. "I've never liked Aunt Hattie, and I don't see that we should accept her money now. And, if I must say it, I don't think we've a right to take it, after the way I've treated her, and after the way she treated us since then."

"You are too proud, Talliaferro," said Melora, and Tallulah nodded in agreement.

"Very well," said Talliaferro. "I think we'd better write the lawyer today."

THE Pepperalls came to Wisconsin, and in the small town where their Aunt Hattie had lived and died, "hating" them, as Tallulah said, they took up residence in the old-fashioned Middle Western mansion, there to live secluded lives, as they had done in New Orleans.

The house had two stories, and, best of all, both back and front stairs. It was the largest house in town, and even had servants' quarters; though, to be sure, these were small and cramped. The first floor was taken up largely by a striking drawing-room and a too ornate dining-

room. The second floor was mostly bedrooms. Melora, being the oldest, got Aunt Hattie's bedroom, the grand one with the Sheraton mirror to the dressing-table. And Tallulah was content with the guest bedroom just next to her, while Talliaferro slept some distance down the hall.

It took them a time to get used to the house, which was even better than they had hoped, despite its definite atmosphere of past decades.

"And just think, we could have had all this before, but for you, Talliaferro," said Melora, her eyes shining with pleas-

They were standing in the drawing-room. Talliaferro smiled reminiscently. "It was in this very room that I insulted her," he said. "What did I call her, Melora?"

Melora shook her head, but Tallulah said, "I remember. You said she was a 'homely old witch' and a 'wicked meddler', and then you told her she'd be better off dead."

Talliaferro nodded, remembering. "I am still not sorry," he said. "She deserved it, and more. She had no business to meddle in Father's affairs as she did." He hesitated, not quite sure of himself. "But she was not right to take it so seriously," he continued presently. "I was quite young, then, and she might have overlooked it in time."

"I don't think she would have been so angry if it hadn't been that Father refused to punish you," said Melora slow-

"Look! The shadow in the glass!"

ly. "I do think that turned her anger into hate finally."

Talliaferro shrugged. "Ah, well, she's dead and gone now, poor soul."

"How she would enjoy hearing you call her 'poor soul', Talliaferro!" exclaimed Tallulah.

Melora said, as if suddenly remembering, "Did you ever see the letter Aunt Hattie wrote Father just before he died, Talliaferro?"

"I saw no letter."

"It was the most vindictive writing—and that was years after it happened. She said you should be punished still, and that some day if she saw you again, she would punish you—it would be waiting, she promised. And Tallulah and I were to be punished, too, for defending you."

Talliaferro toyed with his snuff-box. "Ah, well," he said, "it doesn't matter. We've got much to thank her for now."

Melora, however, was not listening. She was looking beyond her brother into the hall. "Will you see whether there is some one in the hall, Tallulah?" she asked abruptly. "I thought——"

Tallulah went forward quickly, brushed aside the portieres, and looked into the hall. "There is no one here," she said, coming back into the room.

Melora shrugged. "I thought I saw some one standing there, looking in at us from between the curtains. Couldn't have been the maid, could it?"

Tallulah shook her head. "She won't be here until tomorrow, and the butler comes tonight."

"Curious! I was sure I had seen some one there." She smiled uncertainly. "Time for dinner soon," she said, moving away toward the kitchen.

Tallulah said, "I'll be with you in a moment, Melora." Then she turned and began to go up the front stairs, paused a moment to call down to Talliaferro, who was still standing in the drawing-room, and went on.

At the top of the stairs she stood for a moment to look down the carpeted hall. She was just about to go to her room when she saw the flirt of a satin skirt disappearing into Melora's room. She went forward, thinking: I wonder what Melora wants; she should be getting dinner. Just as she came to the door of Melora's room, she heard a slight rustling on the back stairs; turning quickly, she saw Melora, a little breathless, coming up the stairs.

"Why, Melora," she called down in a surprized voice. "I could have sworn I just saw you go into your room."

"No, I've been in the kitchen, Tallulah. I've mislaid my handkerchief somewhere, and just came up to get another," explained Melora, as she came toward her sister.

"Of course. I should have known you weren't wearing satin today," said Tallulah, smiling.

Melora stopped, standing quite still. "Satin, did you say, Tallulah?"

Tallulah looked at her uncertainly. "I thought I saw a satin skirt just vanishing into your room, Melora," she said. "I swear I did, really."

Melora said, "And I thought a woman in satin was watching us in the drawing-room. I thought I saw her standing in the hall."

Tallulah laughed weakly. "We're seeing things, Melora. I think we're too exhausted with getting things straightened up here. I'll be glad when the maid and butler come."

Melora said no more. She went quickly into her room and got a handkerchief. Together, the sisters went downstairs to prepare dinner.

A FEW days after the Pepperalls had taken possession, the lawyer called, and they had some conversation over the tea-cups. Talliaferro was not there.

Tallulah asked, "Was Aunt Hattie taken badly before she died?"

The lawyer blinked a little oddly and said, "Well, I really couldn't say. I wasn't here—that is, not in the house—at the time."

Melora thought the lawyer sounded nervous, "evasive," she said afterward. She put in a question quickly, "Who doctored her? Perhaps you can tell us that?"

The lawyer coughed and said, "Doctor Mason. You'll find him down the street a way. But he hadn't been to see her for ten days before she died."

Tallulah protested, "But that's sheer neglect, I'd say."

Melora nodded in agreement. "It is so," she said. "I think we'd better see that doctor."

Then the lawyer spoke again, his words coming very reluctantly. "Why, I thought I told you in the letter, but I guess I didn't, after all. You see, your aunt had gotten somewhat better. She'd been up, in fact, and then one day she called the doctor and said she'd got the pains again, and asked him to come up. That he couldn't do until the afternoon; then he came.

"She was dead when he got here. It wasn't his fault, because she hadn't died of the pains. She'd somehow managed to—well, she tied the scarf to that chandelier in her bedroom—it's pretty strong, you see." The lawyer finished in some agitation.

Melora put her cup down with nervous fingers. Her face went suddenly white.

"Hanged herself, did she?" said Tallulah bluntly.

The lawyer nodded.

Melora said, "I'm glad you told us now. I'd rather like it if you said no word to Talliaferro, that is, my brother. He's not so well, and shocks aren't good for him."

"I see. I'll say nothing, then," said the lawyer, smiling. "But it's pretty well known, of course, and you can't keep him from knowing for ever."

Melora nodded. "I suppose not, but I'll thank you to say nothing just the same. We're not that sociable that we'd hear such talk going about very easily."

The lawyer nodded, smiled, and talked a little more about the change in weather the Pepperalls could expect now in Wisconsin. He went at last, and left the sisters sitting alone.

TALLULAH gave her older sister a curious look. "It is hard to believe, Melora. She hating us so, and then putting herself out of the way to let us get the property and all." She fingered her bracelet absently.

Melora nodded. "Yes, it is strange. I don't understand, Tallulah. I think there's something wrong somewhere."

"Oh," said Tallulah quickly, "do you feel it, too?"

Melora was startled. "Feel what?" she asked sharply. "What is it, Tallulah?"

"Nothing," said her sister. "Nothing—that is—yes, it *is* something, Melora. There's some one here, hiding in this house. I can feel it, some one is watching us. It's frightening me. I'm afraid, Melora."

Melora said, "I've felt that, too. Some one watching—a woman . . . in black satin."

Tallulah swallowed suddenly; then, hearing footsteps in the hall beyond, bent forward and whispered harshly, "Aunt Hattie always wore black satin."

Talliaferro Pepperall came into the room and sat down. "Lawyer just here, was he? Have anything to say?"

"Not much," said Melora easily.

Tallulah rang for the maid to take away the tea things.

Going up the broad front stairs a little later, Tallulah was suddenly confronted by Melora. For a moment she was startled. Melora motioned her to come on more quickly.

"An odd thing has happened," she said, as they went along down the hall, "a very odd thing, Tallulah. Come into my room; I want you to see it."

They went into Melora's room, but Tallulah could see nothing out of the ordinary. "What is it?" she asked.

"The mirror. Don't you see it?" Melora was agitated.

There was a vague dark spot in the glass of the Sheraton mirror. Instinctively Tallulah moved forward and made an attempt to rub out the spot.

"It won't come out," said Melora. "It wasn't there when we came here, Tallulah. I don't understand what it could be. If you'll look closely, you'll see it isn't *on* the glass—it's *in* the glass."

"Likely a defect in the glass, Melora."

"Odd that it should show itself first now, after all these years," said Melora dubiously. "Aunt Hattie had the mirror before we were born."

"It is odd," said Tallulah, going slowly from the room, "but nothing to worry about—just so it doesn't spoil the mirror."

IN THE night Tallulah heard her sister's light tap on her door, and Melora's muffled voice, "Are you awake, Tallulah?"

In a moment she was out of bed and in her dressing-gown, and in another she had opened the door and was confronting Melora, who was standing there in her kimono, her face white and drawn, her hands twisting nervously.

"What has happened?" asked Tallulah quickly.

"Come into my room right away. I want you to look at the mirror again."

Tallulah wanted to brush aside her sister's fear, but the expression on Melora's face prevented her. Without a word, she followed her sister.

Melora's room was brilliantly lit. Melora strode before Tallulah, pointing dramatically at the mirror. Tallulah gasped. There had been a perceptible change in the dark spot in the glass. It had grown somewhat larger, and had taken on a form, a vague, suggestive shape. . . . Tallulah felt suddenly afraid, but looking at her sister's apprehensive face, she knew she must not show her own fear.

"It looks like a reflection, doesn't it?" she said presently.

Melora nodded.

"Like something hanging in the room somewhere," continued Tallulah, looking hard at her sister.

"Tallulah, what are you saying!" protested Melora, but she was waiting to hear more, was indeed eager to have Tallulah confirm her own secret thought which she was herself afraid to voice.

"It looks like something hanging—from the chandelier, I'd say."

At this Melora became distinctly less agitated, seeming to breathe a little easier, as if the recognition of some impending danger had given way to the less fearful thought of combating it. "Now that we both see it, both feel that way," she began, smiling uncertainly, "perhaps we can do something. I've thought so, watching it grow so strangely. I think we'd better say nothing about it to any one but ourselves—we'd best keep it from Talliaferro, his heart being so bad."

"Of course," said Tallulah. "But why don't you change your room, or sell the mirror, Melora?"

"Talliaferro might wonder why. Be-

sides, it doesn't do any harm, just a reflection like that. Not even clear."

"But it's growing clear, Melora."

Melora hesitated, considering the mirror and the horrific suggestion of the shadow in the glass. "We'll wait and see," she said finally.

It was not difficult for the sisters Pepperall to keep all knowledge of the spot in the Sheraton mirror from Talliaferro, but it was not as easy to prevent his noticing the strain and uneasiness growing daily more obvious in the conversation and actions of Melora and Tallulah. Talliaferro soon sensed something wrong in this curious restraint, and took to watching his sisters surreptitiously.

The spot in the glass grew steadily more and more disturbing, gaining shape daily. Melora went as little as possible to her room, and took to going to bed without a light, which the watchful Talliaferro did not fail to notice. During all of one day the vague reflection grew very clear, and Miss Melora, who had gone into the room just ahead of her sister, screamed involuntarily at sight of the shadow in the glass.

"Look!" she cried. "She's hanging there. It's Aunt Hattie!"

Tallulah shrank back, tensing herself. "It is," she breathed. Then she took her sister by the arm, holding her tightly, hurting her. "Now I know why *she* wanted us here. Now I know. She hating us all the time. When Talliaferro sees her, the shock—oh, she knew, she knew!"

Talliaferro appeared suddenly in the doorway. "Seeing things again, are you, Melora?" He frowned at his sisters. "I don't understand what ails you," he went on in an almost petulant voice. "I overheard you talking days ago. I think you'd better see a doctor. It's madness coming over you."

"Madness! Of course, it's madness," said Melora abruptly, her voice strident, forgetting to think of Talliaferro's heart. "It may well be. I can see something hanging there. Look at it. Look into the mirror. It's there. I know it is. Talliaferro, look into the mirror."

Talliaferro came forward to her side and looked over her shoulder.

"Can you see it?" breathed Melora. "Tell me you can see it, Talliaferro."

Talliaferro looked at her queerly and said, "I can see it."

"What is it? Tell me. I've been seeing it for days, now. It's worse afternoons, seems, and at night. Tell me, isn't it—Aunt Hattie?"

Talliaferro said, "I don't know what it could be."

And Melora, hearing this, knew suddenly that Talliaferro could not see Aunt Hattie hanging there at all, and he the one she'd hated most all her life.

Talliaferro spoke to Tallulah when they were alone together somewhat later. "I'm afraid your sister's losing her mind, Tallulah," he said without preamble. "It's that confounded mirror—she sees things there."

Tallulah said, "Yes, I've seen the same thing." She tried to keep her voice calm, but it trembled just a little in apprehension at his reaction.

"Are both of you mad?"

Tallulah looked at him, her eyes suddenly cold. "If you want to call it that, Talliaferro—yes!"

Talliaferro Pepperall left his sister and stamped up the stairs to his room. He was thinking: She hated me most, she hated me most; and he could not understand that this madness should come to Melora and Tallulah, sparing him. When he heard Melora going down the stairs, he crept silently the length of the hall to her room.

He pushed open the door and looked at the mirror. There was nothing there. He went back to his room, disturbed.

Downstairs, Melora was speaking to Tallulah. "Why can't he see it?" she asked. "Why can't he see it?"

"Oh, don't you see, Melora? Don't you see? If it grew on him day by day, perhaps he'd get used to it. But if it came to him suddenly, abruptly. . . . Don't you see now?"

"You mean, that suddenly she will let him see her there? And his heart . . . oh, God, Tallulah, do you think she would—*do that?*"

Tallulah nodded, pursing her lips grimly. "She hated him terribly. And she promised that his punishment would be waiting for him—here."

Melora drew herself together. "I'm going to smash that glass, Tallulah."

Talliaferro Pepperall went once more down the hall, pushed open the door of Melora's room, and looked again at the mirror. There was a reflection there—a reflection of something hanging in the glass, and as he looked, it swung around and looked at him. It was Aunt Hattie. Talliaferro pulled the door shut and ran to his room, his heart beating wildly. I didn't see it there, he thought; no, I didn't! Then, abruptly, he ran down the stairs to tell his sisters that he, too, had seen.

But they were not there. They had gone through to the back of the house, and were even now going up the back stairs. Talliaferro heard them, and he thought, They will see her now! forgetting that they had seen her there often. He heard them walking slowly along the hall above. He wanted to call out, to warn them, but he stood there silent, waiting. Then he heard the door of Melora's room open, and then a terrible silence.

Abruptly, he heard both of them screaming shrilly, but he could not bring himself to run up there to see what they had seen. He came to the foot of the front stairs and looked up. At the top some one was standing, motioning to him—a woman in black satin. He should come up, the figure motioned. Talliaferro was bewildered. A woman in black satin? Who could it be? Black satin. He had known some one somewhere who always wore black satin. Who, who was it? His mind was not clear, but from somewhere a name came to him—*Aunt Hattie!*

The woman was gone abruptly. Fear had encompassed Talliaferro; it pressed upon him with a multitude of icy fingers, but a greater force was drawing him slowly forward. He went hesitatingly up the stairs, and into Melora's room. Melora and Tallulah were huddled together, staring at the mirror. Talliaferro looked at the glass, and there he saw the face of his dead aunt for the second time. The face was distorted, horrible—and it was moving, moving about at the end of the scarf, fascinating the three of them. Talliaferro sat down heavily; his heart beat loudly, irregularly, and he felt a closeness suffocating him. His sisters did not appear to notice him.

Talliaferro's lips opened, and he began to speak, slowly, and with apparent effort. "She killed herself here," he murmured, "hanged herself where the glass caught the reflection. That's it. She was caught in the glass and couldn't get out."

MELORA turned and seemed to notice her brother for the first time. She leaned over and touched Tallulah's arm gently. "He sees her now," she whispered. "He sees her. She's watching him. Oh, look at her eyes!"

The eyes of the thing in the glass had begun to glow, shining out toward Tal-

liaferro, who went on mumbling without noticing, his voice rising steadily. "To be caught like that, a woman caught. We can't help her, won't help her. Homely old witch-woman. She hates us, hates us, and I hate her!"

He got up abruptly and went straight to the glass. He bent his head and pressed his face close to the swinging figure. And then he saw the eyes of the dead woman open wide. With a terrible cry, Talliaferro caught up Melora's steel-backed brush from the dressing-table and struck at the glass. He struck blindly, until he had broken the mirror into many pieces. Then he stepped back a little, dropped the brush, and passed his hand vaguely over his forehead. He looked at his startled sisters and smiled wanly. From within him a tumult arose suddenly, engulfing him. Then he began to sway gently from side to side.

Melora came to her feet just as he crashed to the floor and sprawled there. She ran to him, coming down on her knees beside him. "Talliaferro," she cried, and touched him. "Talliaferro!" She looked over her shoulder at Tallulah and cried out, "He's dead!"

Then Tallulah began to scream. She was looking beyond Melora, at the space on the wall in the frame of the broken mirror. "It's the woman. There behind you, on the wall!"

Melora sat there, hunched on the floor as if frozen. "No, Tallulah," she said. "Talliaferro killed her. I saw him do it. I saw him."

But Tallulah went on screaming. She was still screaming when the frightened maid made her way into the room, followed by the butler. They found Melora hunched on the floor beside the body of Talliaferro, gently stroking one of his hands. She did not appear to see them, for her eyes never once left the jagged aperture where the mirror had been.

Her lips were moving a little, and when the maid touched her shoulder gently, she heard Melora whimpering in a little child voice, "Go away, please. Talliaferro killed you—homely witch-woman. I saw him. Go away, Aunt Hattie."

An Open Window

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Behind the Veil what gulfs of Time and Space?
What blinking mowing Shapes to blast the sight?
I shrink before a vague colossal Face
Born in the mad immensities of Night.

The Empire of the Necromancers

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

An endless army of plague-eaten bodies, of tattered skeletons, poured in ghastly torrents through the streets of the city

THE legend of Mmatmuor and Sodosma shall arise only in the latter cycles of Earth, when the glad legends of the prime have been forgotten. Before the time of its telling, many epochs shall have passed away, and the seas shall have fallen in their beds, and new continents shall have come to birth. Perhaps, in that day, it will serve to beguile for a little the black weariness of a dying race, grown hopeless of all but oblivion. I tell the tale as men shall tell it in Zothique, the last continent, beneath a dim sun and sad heavens where the stars come out in terrible brightness before eventide.

1

MMATMUOR and Sodosma were necromancers who came from the dark isle of Naat, to practise their baleful arts in Tinarath, beyond the shrunken seas. But they did not prosper in Tinarath: for death was deemed a holy thing by the people of that gray country; and the nothingness of the tomb was not lightly to be desecrated; and the raising up of the dead by necromancy was held in abomination.

So, after a short interval, Mmatmuor and Sodosma were driven forth by the anger of the inhabitants, and were compelled to flee toward Cincor, a desert of the south, which was peopled only by the bones and mummies of a race that the pestilence had slain in former time.

The land into which they went lay drear and leprous and ashen below the huge, ember-colored sun. Its crumbling rocks and deathly solitudes of sand would have struck terror to the hearts of common men; and, since they had been thrust out in that barren place without food or sustenance, the plight of the sorcerers might well have seemed a desperate one. But, smiling secretly, with the air of conquerors who tread the approaches of a long-coveted realm, Sodosma and Mmatmuor walked steadily on into Cincor.

Unbroken before them, through fields devoid of trees and grass, and across the channels of dried-up rivers, there ran the great highway by which travellers had gone formerly between Cincor and Tinarath. Here they met no living thing; but soon they came to the skeletons of a horse and its rider, lying full in the road, and wearing still the sumptuous harness and raiment which they had worn in the flesh. And Mmatmuor and Sodosma paused before the piteous bones, on which no shred of corruption remained; and they smiled evilly at each other.

"The steed shall be yours," said Mmatmuor, "since you are a little the elder of us two, and are thus entitled to precedence; and the rider shall serve us both and be the first to acknowledge fealty to us in Cincor."

Then, in the ashy sand by the wayside, they drew a threefold circle; and stand-

"Sodosma mounted the skeleton steed and took up the jewelled reins."

ing together at its center, they performed the abominable rites that compel the dead to arise from tranquil nothingness and obey henceforward, in all things, the dark will of the necromancer. Afterward they sprinkled a pinch of magic powder on the nostril-holes of the man and the horse; and the white bones, creaking mournfully, rose up from where they had lain and stood in readiness to serve their masters.

So, as had been agreed between them, Sodosma mounted the skeleton steed and took up the jewelled reins, and rode in an evil mockery of Death on his pale horse; while Mmatmuor trudged on beside him, leaning lightly on an ebon staff; and the skeleton of the man, with its rich raiment flapping loosely, followed behind the two like a servitor.

After a while, in the gray waste, they found the remnant of another horse and rider, which the jackals had spared and the sun had dried to the leanness of old mummies. These also they raised up from death; and Mmatmuor bestrode the withered charger; and the two magicians rode on in state, like errant emperors, with a lich and a skeleton to attend them. Other bones and charnel remnants of men and beasts, to which they came anon, were duly resurrected in like fashion; so that they gathered to themselves an ever-swelling train in their progress through Cincor.

Along the way, as they neared Yethlyreom, which had been the capital, they found numerous tombs and necropoli, inviolate still after many ages, and containing swathed mummies that had scarcely withered in death. All these they raised up and called from sepulchral night to do their bidding. Some they commanded to

sow and till the desert fields and hoist water from the sunken wells; others they left at diverse tasks, such as the mummies had performed in life. The century-long silence was broken by the noise and tumult of myriad activities; and the lank liches of weavers toiled at their shuttles; and the corpses of plowmen followed their furrows behind carrion oxen.

WEARY with their strange journey and their oft-repeated incantations, Mmatmuor and Sodosma saw before them at last, from a desert hill, the lofty spires and fair, unbroken domes of Yethlyreom, steeped in the darkening stagnant blood of ominous sunset.

"It is a goodly land," said Mmatmuor, "and you and I will share it between us, and hold dominion over all its dead, and be crowned as emperors on the morrow in Yethlyreom."

"Aye," replied Sodosma, "for there is none living to dispute us here; and those that we have summoned from the tomb shall move and breathe only at our dictation, and may not rebel against us."

So, in the blood-red twilight that thickened with purple, they entered Yethlyreom and rode on among the lofty, lampless mansions, and installed themselves with their grisly retinue in that stately and abandoned palace, where the dynasty of Nimboth emperors had reigned for two thousand years with dominion over Cincor.

In the dusty golden halls, they lit the empty lamps of onyx by means of their cunning sorcery, and supped on royal viands, provided from past years, which they evoked in like manner. Ancient and imperial wines were poured for them in moonstone cups by the fleshless hands of their servitors; and they drank and feasted and revelled in fantasmagoric pomp, deferring till the morrow the resurrection of those who lay dead in Yethlyreom.

They rose betimes, in the dark crimson dawn, from the opulent palace-beds in which they had slept; for much remained to be done. Everywhere in that forgotten city, they went busily to and fro, working their spells on the people that had died in the last year of the pest and had lain unburied. And having accomplished this, they passed beyond Yethlyreom into that other city of high tombs and mighty mausoleums, in which lay the Nimboth emperors and the more consequential citizens and nobles of Cincor.

Here they bade their skeleton slaves to break in the sealed doors with hammers; and then, with their sinful, tyrannous incantations, they called forth the imperial mummies, even to the eldest of the dynasty, all of whom came walking stiffly, with lightless eyes, in rich swathings sewn with flame-bright jewels. And also, later, they brought forth to a semblance of life many generations of courtiers and dignitaries.

Moving in solemn pageant, with dark and haughty and hollow faces, the dead emperors and empresses of Cincor made obeisance to Mmatmuor and Sodosma, and attended them like a train of captives through all the streets of Yethlyreom. Afterward, in the immense throne-room of the palace, the necromancers mounted the high double throne, where the rightful rulers had sat with their consorts. Amid the assembled emperors, in gorgeous and funereal state, they were invested with sovereignty by the sere hands of the mummy of Hestaiyon, earliest of the Nimboth line, who had ruled in half-mythic years. Then all the descendants of Hestaiyon, crowding the room in a great throng, acclaimed with toneless, echo-like voices the dominion of Mmatmuor and Sodosma.

Thus did the outcast necromancers find for themselves an empire and a subject people in the desolate, barren land where

the men of Tinarath had driven them forth to perish. Reigning supreme over all the dead of Cincor, by virtue of their malign magic, they exercised a baleful despotism. Tribute was borne to them by fleshless porters from outlying realms; and plague-eaten corpses, and tall mummies scented with mortuary balsams, went to and fro upon their errands in Yethlyreom, or heaped before their greedy eyes, from inexhaustible vaults, the cobweb-blackened gold and dusty gems of antique time.

Dead laborers made their palace-gardens to bloom with long-perished flowers; liches and skeletons toiled for them in the mines, or reared superb, fantastic towers to the dying sun. Chamberlains and princes of old time were their cup-bearers, and stringed instruments were plucked for their delight by the slim hands of empresses with golden hair that had come forth untarnished from the night of the tomb. Those that were fairest, whom the plague and the worm had not ravaged overmuch, they took for their lemans and made to serve their necrophilic lust.

2

In all things, the people of Cincor performed the actions of life at the will of Mmatmuor and Sodosma. They spoke, they moved, they ate and drank as in life. They heard and saw and felt with a similitude of the senses that had been theirs before death; but their brains were enthralled by a dreadful necromancy. They recalled but dimly their former existence; and the state to which they had been summoned was empty and troublous and shadow-like. Their blood ran chill and sluggish, mingled with water of Lethe; and the vapors of Lethe clouded their eyes.

Dumbly they obeyed the dictates of their tyrannous lords, without rebellion or protest, but filled with a vague, illimitable weariness such as the dead must know, when having drunk of eternal sleep, they are called back once more to the bitterness of mortal being. They knew no passion or desire or delight, only the black languor of their awakening from Lethe, and a gray, ceaseless longing to return to that interrupted slumber.

Youngest and last of the Nimboth emperors was Illeiro, who had died in the first month of the plague, and had lain in his high-built mausoleum for two hundred years before the coming of the necromancers.

Raised up with his people and his fathers to attend the tyrants, Illeiro had resumed the emptiness of existence without question and had felt no surprize. He had accepted his own resurrection and that of his ancestors as one accepts the indignities and marvels of a dream. He knew that he had come back to a faded sun, to a hollow and spectral world, to an order of things in which his place was merely that of an obedient shadow. But at first he was troubled only, like the others, by a dim weariness and a pale hunger for the lost oblivion.

Drugged by the magic of his overlords, weak from the age-long nullity of death, he beheld like a somnambulist the enormities to which his fathers were subjected. Yet, somehow, after many days, a feeble spark awoke in the sodden twilight of his mind.

Like something lost and irretrievable, beyond prodigious gulfs, he recalled the pomp of his reign in Yethlyreom, and the golden pride and exultation that had been his in youth. And recalling it, he felt a vague stirring of revolt, a ghostly resentment against the magicians who had haled him forth to this calamitous mockery of life. Darkly he began to grieve for his fallen state, and the mournful plight of his ancestors and his people.

Day by day, as a cup-bearer in the halls where he had ruled aforetime, Illeiro saw the doings of Mmatmuor and Sodosma. He saw their caprices of cruelty and lust, their growing drunkenness and gluttony. He watched them wallow in their necromantic luxury, and become lax with indolence, gross with indulgence. They neglected the study of their art, they forgot many of their spells. But still they ruled, mighty and formidable; and, lolling on couches of purple and rose, they planned to lead an army of the dead against Tinarath.

Dreaming of conquest, and of vaster necromancies, they grew fat and slothful as worms that have installed themselves in a charnel rich with corruption. And pace by pace with their laxness and tyranny, the fire of rebellion mounted in the shadowy heart of Illeiro, like a flame that struggles with Lethean damps. And slowly, with the waxing of his wrath, there returned to him something of the strength and firmness that had been his in life. Seeing the turpitude of the oppressors, and knowing the wrong that had been done to the helpless dead, he heard in his brain the clamor of stifled voices demanding vengeance.

Among his fathers, through the palace-halls of Yethlyreom, Illeiro moved silently at the bidding of the masters, or stood awaiting their command. He poured in their cups of onyx the amber vintages, brought by wizardry from hills beneath a younger sun; he submitted to their contumelies and insults. And night by night he watched them nod in their drunkenness, till they fell asleep, flushed and gross, amid their arrogated splendor.

There was little speech among the living dead; and son and father, daughter and mother, lover and beloved, went to and fro without sign of recognition, making no comment on their evil lot. But at last, one midnight, when the tyrants lay in slumber, and the flames wavered in the necromantic lamps, Illeiro took counsel with Hestaiyon, his eldest ancestor, who had been famed as a great wizard in fable and was reputed to have known the secret lore of antiquity.

HESTAIYON stood apart from the others, in a corner of the shadowy hall. He was brown and withered in his crumbling mummy-cloths; and his lightless obsidian eyes appeared to gaze still upon nothingness. He seemed not to have heard the questions of Illeiro; but at length, in a dry, rustling whisper, he responded:

"I am old, and the night of the sepulcher was long, and I have forgotten much. Yet, groping backward across the void of death, it may be that I shall retrieve something of my former wisdom; and between us we shall devise a mode of deliverance." And Hestaiyon searched among the shreds of memory, as one who reaches into a place where the worm has been and the hidden archives of old time have rotted in their covers; till at last he remembered, and said:

"I recall that I was once a mighty wizard; and among other things, I knew the spells of necromancy, but employed them not, deeming their use and the raising up of the dead an abhorrent act. Also, I possessed other knowledge; and perhaps, among the remnants of that ancient lore, there is something which may serve to guide us now. For I recall a dim, dubitable prophecy, made in the primal years, at the founding of Yethlyreom and the empire of Cincor. The prophecy was, that an evil greater than death would befall the emperors and the people of Cincor in future time; and that the first and the last of the Nimboth dynasty, conferring together, would effect a mode of release and the lifting of the doom. "The

evil was not named in the prophecy; but it was said that the two emperors would learn the solution of their problem by the breaking of an ancient clay image that guards the nethermost vault below the imperial palace in Yethlyreom."

Then, having heard this prophecy from the faded lips of his forefather, Illeiro mused a while, and said:

"I remember now an afternoon in early youth, when searching idly through the unused vaults of our palace, as a boy might do, I came to the last vault and found therein a dusty, uncouth image of clay, whose form and countenance were strange to me. And, knowing not the prophecy, I turned away in disappointment, and went back as idly as I had come, to seek the moted sunlight."

Then, stealing away from their heedless kinfolk, and carrying jewelled lamps they had taken from the hall, Hestaiyon and Illeiro went downward by subterranean stairs beneath the palace; and, threading like implacable furtive shadows the maze of nighted corridors, they came at last to the lowest crypt.

Here, in the black dust and clotted cobwebs of an immemorial past, they found, as had been decreed, the clay image, whose rude features were those of a forgotten earthly god. And Illeiro shattered the image with a fragment of stone; and he and Hestaiyon took from its hollow center a great sword of unrusted steel, and a heavy key of untarnished bronze, and tablets of bright brass on which were inscribed the various things to be done, so that Cincor should be rid of the dark reign of the necromancers and the people should win back to oblivious death.

So, with the key of untarnished bronze, Illeiro unlocked, as the tablets had instructed him to do, a low and narrow door at the end of the nethermost vault, beyond the broken image; and he and Hestaiyon saw, as had been prophesied, the coiling steps of somber stone that led downward to an undiscovered abyss, where the sunken fires of earth still burned. And leaving Illeiro to ward the open door, Hestaiyon took up the sword of unrusted steel in his thin hand, and went back to the hall where the necromancers slept, lying a-sprawl on their couches of rose and purple, with the wan, bloodless dead about them in patient ranks.

UPHELD by the ancient prophecy and the lore of the bright tablets, Hestaiyon lifted the great sword and struck off the head of Mmatmuor and the head of Sodosma, each with a single blow. Then, as had been directed, he quartered the remains with mighty strokes. And the necromancers gave up their unclean lives, and lay supine, without movement, adding a deeper red to the rose and a brighter hue to the sad purple of their couches.

Then, to his kin, who stood silent and listless, hardly knowing their liberation, the venerable mummy of Hestaiyon spoke in sere murmurs, but authoritatively, as a king who issues commands to his children. The dead emperors and empresses stirred, like autumn leaves in a sudden wind, and a whisper passed among them and went forth from the palace, to be communicated at length, by devious ways, to all the dead of Cincor.

All that night, and during the blood-dark day that followed, by wavering torches or the light of the failing sun, an endless army of plague-eaten liches, of tattered skeletons, poured in a ghastly torrent through the streets of Yethlyreom and along the palace-hall where Hestaiyon stood guard above the slain necromancers. Unpausing, with vague, fixed eyes, they went on like driven shadows, to seek the subterranean vaults below the palace, to pass through the open door where Il-

leiro waited in the last vault, and then to wend downward by a thousand thousand steps to the verge of that gulf in which boiled the ebbing fires of earth. There, from the verge, they flung themselves to a second death and the clean annihilation of the bottomless flames.

But, after all had gone to their release, Hestaiyon still remained, alone in the fading sunset, beside the cloven corpses of Mmatmuor and Sodosma. There, as the tablets had directed him to do, he made trial of those spells of elder necromancy which he had known in his former wisdom, and cursed the dismembered bodies with that perpetual life-in-death which Mmatmuor and Sodosma had sought to inflict upon the people of Cincor. And maledictions came from the pale lips, and the heads rolled horribly with glaring eyes, and the limbs and torsos writhed on their imperial couches amid clotted blood. Then, with no backward look, knowing that all was done as had been ordained and predicted from the first, the mummy of Hestaiyon left the necromancers to their doom, and went wearily through the nighted labyrinth of vaults to rejoin Illeiro.

So, in tranquil silence, with no further need of words, Illeiro and Hestaiyon passed through the open door of the nether vault, and Illeiro locked the door behind them with its key of untarnished bronze. And thence, by the coiling stairs, they wended their way to the verge of the sunken flames and were one with their kinsfolk and their people in the last, ultimate nothingness.

But of Mmatmuor and Sodosma, men say that their quartered bodies crawl to and fro to this day in Yethlyreom, finding no peace or respite from their doom of life-in-death, and seeking vainly through the black maze of nether vaults the door that was locked by Illeiro.

Deserted Manor

By MARION DOYLE

From every side the gaunt and dying pines,
  Stooped with their burden of two hundred years,
Lean toward the ancient manor's scrolled designs,
  Whispering incessantly; each strangely peers
Across the sagging roofs, the ornate eaves,
  Where winds complain and hidden waters break
  The eery silence with the intolerable ache
Of echoed music when the wood-dove grieves.

Even the moonlight enters warily,
  Stealthily stepping on the ruined stair,
  Fearful of being taken unaware,
Yet seems to listen for some embassy
  From unseen worlds, throwing a spangled glance
  Into the gloom before the next advance.

"Nita gave a last scream of fear as Gregory toppled with her to the water, and a blinding flash burned our eyeballs."

The Last of Placide's Wife

By KIRK MASHBURN

A thrill-tale of a fierce and bloody fight in a Louisiana swamp between a maddened group of Cajuns and a horde of vampires

IT MUST have been a fierce and bloody fight. I heard excited talk of it as soon as I stepped from the train in Labranch. My duties as district highway engineer had brought me there before, and nearly every one in the little town knew who I was. But they are folk shy in the presence of strangers, most of them, in that rural, almost isolated section. I was an outsider, and sensed something of their talk kept apart from me as such.

I heard only that there had been a wild fight, the night before, between the sheriff's men and a gang of murderous gipsies—though particulars were more than vague about the gipsies. On the island in the fork of Labranch Bayou, they said it was; and that roused my interest at once. For it was there the highway department was building a difficult stretch of road no contractor had cared to undertake. I hurried to the island, and what I

found in the road camp brought me back at once to town.

I had been told—almost the only definite information I had got—that I would find young Delacroix, the timekeeper and camp clerk, at the only hotel in Labranch. I located his room, and entered in a considerable temper, when he opened to my knock.

"Come in—sit down," Delacroix greeted me pleasantly, waving to a chair and himself slumped casually upon the bed. His gesture embraced a bottle of whisky, half empty, that sat upon a table handy to his reach. "Have a drink?"

"No, I won't have a drink!" I snapped. "Is everybody else drunk, too? I went out to the job, and found two teams idling around, and a half-dozen Cajun and nigger laborers sitting stupidly on stumps—no engineer, no foreman, no timekeeper—nobody!"

"I guess so," Delacroix agreed vaguely, pouring himself a drink. I was by now thoroughly exasperated.

"You guess so!" I exploded. "You're like those Cajun laborers, for all your two years at the university! The total information I got out of them was where to find you. They wouldn't even tell me where the foreman was. Nor Gregory." The latter was the department's section engineer.

"They don't know where Gregory and the foreman are—but you'll never see *them* again," Delacroix informed mildly, after he had swallowed his drink. Then, with sudden force—"Have a drink and keep quiet—or just keep quiet—and I'll tell you about it. *Sit down!*"

Startled, I obeyed without thinking, dropping into the chair behind me. As I was on the point of rising and rescuing my dignity, Delacroix's words caught my attention. Forgetting my anger, I sat and listened.

This is the meat of what I heard:

Old man Landry [Delacroix began] had a son who was attacked, one evening after sunset, while he was hunting in the woods of Labranch Island. They found what was left of him the next day, a small wound in his throat, and his body drained of blood. Well! Right away, everybody said that Placide's wife did it—the wife Placide Duboin buried one night a dozen years ago, because he thought he had killed her. But Nita, his wife, came out of her grave, an undead thing who preyed on the living after sundown. Placide was her first victim.

This dead-alive woman, who lay like a corpse in her grave during each day, rose and walked abroad at night between sunset and dawn, seeking living victims to quench her thirst for blood. Old Landry's son was one of the first to fall her prey, nearly eleven years ago. They found him the next day, and buried him with a stake through his heart. So he did not lie where Nita left him, to arise the next night with his own terrible craving for blood—to be from then on, another such thing as she.

Oh? No, I am not drunk; not yet, at any rate. I am trying to tell you what became of Gregory, and why the road camp is almost empty. Do you want to listen, or not?

Well, anyway, Nita, and those who fell into her clutches and became like her, could not get off that island between the forks of Labranch Bayou, an island some six to eight miles wide, by nearly fifteen miles long. (Vampires and werewolves, you understand, can not cross running water.)

It is across this island that we have been building the new highway. One night, not very long ago, while I was telling Gregory the story of Placide's wife,

there was a knock on the door. And who do you suppose was there? Placide's wife, herself! She pretended otherwise, naturally, but I recognized her and called to old Landry, who had hoped to meet her, and been prepared for the meeting, ever since his son's death. He carried a gun loaded with silver bullets blessed by the priest, the only kind that can kill a vampire. But Nita ran to the woods before Landry came up, and I kept him from following. In the forest, with her pack around her, she would have made short work of the old man.

It had become the main thing in Landry's life, to even up with Nita on account of his son. He finally got so impatient that he went into the woods alone, one evening, hoping to put a silver bullet into Nita. Doubtless he was a little crazy on the subject. And it turned out that Nita got him! At least, we found he had gone, and he did not come back.

Gregory was sort of skeptical, and didn't much believe the story I told him about Placide's wife. He insisted Nita was nothing but one of a band of gipsy thieves and murderers. He was a special deputy sheriff, Gregory, so he could carry a gun, on account of our payroll and things like that, and he was pretty mad, you understand, about old man Landry. He was already disgusted because it was hard for us to get men who were not afraid of Nita and would stay in our camp on the island at night, and they would come straggling in late every morning. So Gregory got most of our men together the next morning and gave them guns; then sent word to the sheriff here in Labranch, that he was going into the swamps and round up the "gipsies". Ha! I was one of those who went.

We went clear down to where the swamp begins at the end of the island on the bay, without seeing any sign of anybody except two trappers we ran across, men we knew. Nobody expected to find Nita, except Gregory. The men began to get uneasy, late in the afternoon, and decided to turn back before sundown caught us away from camp. Gregory didn't like it, but what was he going to do? The men told him he could stay if he wanted, but they were going back. Gregory used some language I wish I could remember—me, I never can say what I want to when I'm mad!—but he turned back with the rest.

SUNDOWN found us a good mile away from camp, deep in the woods. We still could count on nearly an hour of daylight, and Gregory sneered at the men's uneasiness because the sun had set. But everybody else *was* uneasy, some more than others. The woods were thick, and in the fading light of late day, dim and shadowy. Except for the noise we made ourselves, the forest was still and quiet. But it was an uncomfortable quiet, as if the trees all around us hid things that watched, and waited their own time to show themselves. So!

Suddenly, amid startled exclamations, we stopped in our tracks. Anybody would have stopped! I think we all saw the gleaming shape that barred our way, at the same moment. In a little cleared space ahead of us stood a slender figure, a woman whose body gleamed in the red light of sunset like a statue carved from smooth old ivory. She was completely nude, except that the light breeze wrapped the ends of her shining black hair (which hung like a dark cloak almost to the backs of her knees), carelessly about her hips. Her face was the most beautiful I have ever seen on a woman. Beautiful, that is, except for the evil in her bright eyes, and the cruelty in the smile of her scarlet lips.

But there was nothing beautiful about her to us—we knew that here was the

thing we had hunted—that we had met at last with Placide's wife!

Nita stood, with that mocking smile, looking at us from between narrowed lids that slanted upward, a little, at the corners. She seemed careless, and amused, but I saw her nostrils twitch from where I stood. Like any other wild, naked thing of the woods! Her eyes opened suddenly wide, and they blazed with the same light I have seen in a cat's when she pounced upon a mouse. She waved one slim hand toward us in a swift, fierce gesture.

The woods were suddenly alive. Silent, grinning figures, some clad and some as naked as she, sprang at us from among the trees. Without waiting for a word from Gregory, our men blazed away, with shotguns and pistols. Gregory himself aimed squarely at Nita, and I saw his shotgun spit fire. Nita stood straining forward on her toes, watching as her pack closed with us, her lips drawn tightly back from her sharp, pointed teeth. I saw her laugh, horribly, as Gregory shot at her; then she sprang at him. He pumped buckshot from his gun at close range, but she merely gurgled with that horrible laughter, and leaped at him. After that, I was too busy with a shock-headed and foul-smelling old devil who flung himself on me, to bother with Gregory and Nita.

Nita's band numbered about the same as ours, but they had the strength of oxen. The thing with which I fought, for all his blazing red eyes and dripping mouth, looked like only a scrawny old man. But his hands were iron, and I was helpless in his grip. It seemed that I was tangled in a web, and my arms and legs would not move as I wanted them to, after the old man glared into my eyes. It was like a nightmare, when you try to scream, to run, and can not. Unable to do more than stare ahead with my eyes popping in fright, I felt the awful, reeking mouth of that ancient horror drooling upon my neck. Dimly, I heard Nita screaming, felt the cold lips draw back from my flesh. Nita's voice kept on, sounding as if she moved swiftly from one place to another. All about was a snarling, as of hungry beasts driven from their kills; then everything swam in blackness.

My head cleared, after a minute, and I realized that I was being carried along through the forest, thrown over the shoulder of that old creature who stank, and who had fought me. I said he was old and scrawny; but he carried me as easily as a ten-pound sack of meal. We went through the woods as fast as a horse trots, the trampling of many feet keeping pace with us. I twisted my head about, trying to see.

We went through a dim open space; I twisted enough to look ahead of the dirty old one who carried me, and saw Nita, with Gregory slung on her back, leading the way as easily as though she ran unburdened. Around and behind, the hell-pack ran with us. Each of them carried a man, and some of them seemed to be carrying double. All flitted through the woods, silently and lightly as dark shadows.

On we went, and I knew our direction more by instinct than otherwise, toward the southern end of the island, where the dank woods blend into the swamp that becomes a marsh, lying along the Gulf.

SOON we were in the swamp. Often I heard the suck of soggy earth that clutched at hurrying feet; once scummy water splashed into my down-hung face, as the pack pattered through a shallow pool of smelly, stagnant water. All this time, until we finally came to a stop, I lay

quietly over that old one's shoulder. His arms were about my legs like bands of steel, but not even the thought of struggle or escape came into my queerly dulled brain.

When the troop finally halted, I dimly saw that we were in the middle of a large piece of dry land, slightly higher than the swamp around it, and almost clear of trees. The old pig who carried me let me slip head first to the ground. Thanks to the soft ground, and none to him, my neck was not broken; it was bad enough at that.

I sat up and looked around that place. Other men, no doubt also dropped like sacks of onions, were lying on the ground, or sitting looking stupid, like me. A few were getting groggily to their feet. Not much showed plainly in the dark, but there were other figures with eyes gleaming like wolves', standing over those on the ground, or getting in the way of the few who tottered on their feet. All of these with glowing eyes were half stretching their hands toward the ones they stood by, and at the same time, all looking eagerly at something near where I sat. I looked to see what it was they stared at so, and saw that Nita was standing there. Her eyes were glowing like yellow coals, and she had one hand out to steady Gregory on his feet. Then she waved her other hand lazily toward a clump of bushes, and the shadows with eyes pulled the figures upon the ground to their feet, and prodded them in that direction.

All at once, the knoll began to glow with a dim bluish light, like a wet match in the dark. It came from nowhere, you understand, and did not seem to light the swamp beyond the wide knoll. The light grew stronger, while my dirty old one pushed me along with the rest.

Nita led toward a covert of bushes almost in the middle of the knoll. Within these bushes, the blue light glowed stronger than anywhere else. Nita parted the growth and stepped through, leading Gregory. We pushed and jostled our way behind her.

We scrambled through into a circular open place, in the center of which was a low mound of earth. Nita urged Gregory toward the mound, and gently forced him to sit. She herself leaped lightly up, and turned to face the rest of us, her body gleaming now like a silver column in the blue light. My old one pushed me closer, and the others crowded around. Nita looked us over carefully for a moment, before she spoke.

"There are two more than we are," she said, evidently talking for the benefit of her pack. "I will keep the man I have taken"—she motioned toward Gregory—"and also those other two——" She paused and leaned slightly forward, as the place hummed with angry murmurs and snarls of protest. Her eyes blazed from her narrowed lids, and she snarled back at them.

"Pigs and cattle! I say that three are mine! I am first among you, the mother of the pack, and I claim the right." Her gaze rested on me. "I will take that one," she said, pointing. The smelly old creature who had my arm tightened his grip until his hard, skinny fingers sank into my flesh.

"No!" he screeched; "I caught this one, and I keep him."

"Durand has two: take that one from him." The old one followed the point of her finger, and observed a wolf-eyed one who held fast to a pair of our men. They were two young fellows out of our grubbing gang; and though they stood as quietly as terrified sheep in the clutch of the one Nita called Durand, they were both husky, full-blooded youngsters. My

sale vieux peered at them, both so much larger and stronger than I, and grinned. Slobbering as he grinned, he pushed me toward Nita, and with a little squeal of satisfaction ran and pounced upon the nearest of the grubbers.

Nita coolly claimed a third captive, and the pack started to hustle the rest of our men out of the circular enclosure with sudden eagerness. Nita halted them with a sharp word.

"Wait!" she called, her hand upraised. The pack paused. "Remember," Nita continued, "there is a new one among us, who must have a grave that he can not dig himself. . . . Let the newcomers dig his—*and their own!*—before you . . . drink. . . ." Then she waved them away.

Most of the dullness that had numbed my wits cleared, with the transfer of that old thing's attention from me, and I suddenly observed one that I had not before noticed. I saw old Landry (he whom we had come to avenge!) pushing from the place as eagerly as any of Nita's crew. One knotted hand gripped a staring, white-faced figure—a man he had worked beside, a few days before—that he regarded with greedy, blazing eyes! Landry was the recruit to whom Nita had referred!

The place was left bare of all except Nita and us three she had claimed: Gregory, myself, and a youngish fellow named Alcide Breaux. Nita bent and smiled into Gregory's eyes.

"I leave you for a little while," she told him; and it amused me, even then, because she said it as if it was something for Greg to regret. She stared into his eyes a moment more, and added, "Wait here, quietly, until I come back."

Stepping lithely down, she came over to me, a mocking smile upon her lips.

"So, *M'sieu'* Delacroix! We meet again!" She waited for me to answer, but I only stared at her, trying to put my finger on something that puzzled me.

"This time, you can not call for old Landry to come with his silver bullets—as you did another time, when I knocked at your door in the road camp! This little talk is different, yes?"

That was it! Her talk. Queer, is it not, how trifles occupy the mind at such times?

"Yes," I said; "*your* talk is a whole lot different: the last time I heard you, your English, it was not so good."

"Aha, *M'sieu le Cajun,*" she mocked, "your own is rather queer!" She smiled indulgently, and explained, "I am speaking my own language, the language spoken in the high mountains in a country far beyond the sea. You understand because I will it, and it seems to you that I speak a familiar tongue."

I shrugged, because I could think of nothing to say. Nita touched my chin with the tip of her finger, which was cold as the hand of Death. I bent my head under her touch, so that I looked full into her dark eyes, that seemed to have points of flame dancing in their depths. Once more I began to feel dull and numb, and my wits grew sluggish. It was an effort to think, to concentrate. Nita lightly flipped my chin as she took away her finger.

"You amuse me—a very little, but still you amuse me," I heard her mocking voice in a kind of daze. "I think I shall leave you until later, and take this other oaf. Go sit upon my——" Whatever she was about to say, she checked it, and finished, "Go sit with Gregory."

With no thought to do otherwise, I went and sat down where she told me. Then I saw she was staring into Breaux's face as she had into mine; but her smile was a terrible and ghoulish thing, while her eyes were like flaming pools of fire.

"Come!" she commanded, in a husky, quivering whisper. Obediently, though with a fleeting spasm of despair twitching his face, Breaux followed. He moved too slowly for Nita's liking, for she seized his arm and drew him with feverish eagerness across the clearing. Into the screening bushes she pulled him. Nita fairly panted as she pushed poor Alcide through the growth, and I thought, dully, that her red mouth drooled. It is horrible when I think of it now; but I looked on without interest, then, as the bushes closed behind them, and Nita and Alcide . . . were gone. . . .

How long Gregory and I sat there alone, I have no idea. Neither of us spoke, and time seemed to stand still. It would have been too much effort to talk or move, or even lie back to rest. We kept motionless, I think, and waited; nothing at all mattered, until Nita suddenly came back and smiled down at us.

The fire had left her eyes, and she seemed younger, and *refreshed*. . . . There was a smile of exhilaration on her beautiful red lips, redder now than before. I saw the tip of her tongue lick over those lips with satisfaction. Poor Alcide!

Nita dropped lazily down between us, smiling first at Gregory, then at me. "Don't be so dull-witted!" she reproved. She must have had some deliberate intention of lifting the spell that kept us so listless; for my brain cleared with her words, and I straightened as I sat. So did Gregory. Nita leaned toward him.

"Ah, that is better!" she breathed. "It has been long since any one except stupid, clod-like men, little better than brute beasts, came to this place." She reached out a hand, put it softly upon Greg's knee, her eyes, half closed, smoldering with a fire different from the fierce light that had flamed in them earlier in the evening. "There are other good things besides food and drink—warm, salty drink! This body of mine is still a woman's. . . . Is it not fair?"

She leaned lazily back upon her hands and Gregory and I held our breaths together. Here was a gorgeous creature of pale ivory and ebony and scarlet. Pale ivory body, scarlet lips; and long loose hair as black and bewitching as sin.

God, she was beautiful! There was reason for Gregory to lean toward her, biting his lips—even though he knew, now, what sort of thing she was. Nita had said that she came from a far land: her old-ivory skin, with its hint of underlying olive tint, and the upward slant of her eyes at the corners, told that she spoke the truth. The shameless creature lay back and laughed with brazen delight at Gregory's open fascination.

"Do you find me beautiful?" she demanded naïvely. Sitting up quickly, she eagerly asked, "Do you like beautiful things?"

Gregory stared at her without answering, but there was something in his silence that seemed to please Nita as well as words. "Will you come to me willingly, Gregory, rather than as that one of your men I—had—tonight, without my arms and love to make—what happened—a caress and a promise of future delight in me? Will you take a love no mortal woman could give?"

Suddenly she struck the earth with one small hand. "Do you know what this is?" she demanded. Without waiting for answer, she told us, "It is where I lie and rest during the day—is it not in a good place, here in the heart of this swamp? No trappers or hunters come so far, and you will be safe with me." She laughed, with sudden malicious merriment.

"Old Placide, that dear husband of mine, showed me this place! There was a gipsy peddler who wanted both me

and Placide's money: the money he got for his land when oil was found on it, before I came to Labranch and married him. The money was buried near our house, but Placide was frightened of the peddler, and dug it up, and brought it here where he knew no one would ever come to look for it. I spied on him when he did it, and followed him here. Afterward, I remembered this place. His money is there now, at the head of my earthen couch!" She laughed gleefully again, but sobered quickly. She leaned toward Gregory, and her voice was vibrant with passion. Gregory half raised his hands, and her pale body writhed into his arms. I stared, you can imagine, with my mouth open: I was astonished at Nita, but I was ashamed of Gregory. I was thinking of poor Alcide, you understand!

Then, in a flash, I comprehended. Nita's wild mood fixed her interest on him, and Gregory played up to her, so she would not notice me. He was forcing himself to hold her close, swallowing his disgust to bend his head to those unclean red lips—so I might slip out and escape!

As Greg seized Nita in a sudden fierce grip that I thought was fine acting, I crept on hands and knees behind her back, toward that place through which she took Alcide. Creeping through the bushes, I came on something that caused me to jerk upright, scratching my face on the twigs around me. I looked down into the dead, staring face of Alcide, and shivered all over as I made the cross. Behind me was that mound in the darkness, with a glow like phosphorus hanging around it and around two dark forms, so close together that they were like one. . . .

Not until that minute did I fully realize the awful nightmare of that place and the things that lived there. All my life I had heard tales of vampires and werewolves; I had listened to stories of Placide's wife, and how men had gone into this same swamp, and had not come back. True, I wondered, and I had been careful to keep in camp after sundown, since we had been on the island. But the tales had been tales, and this was something else. I felt the little silver medal hung on a cord around my neck, and whispered to all the saints I could remember. Heh! You can believe *that!*

Very carefully, I poked my head out and looked around. There was not much of a moon, and all I could see, at first, was those other mounds that covered the flat knoll. The bluish glow that had lighted up the place when we first came had died away; but there was that sort of phosphorous haze about some of the mounds, and I gradually made out some dark objects lying or hunkered up on all of them. In most cases, there were two of them on each mound—one lying across the other.

In a flash, I knew what those dark shapes were! One of each pair was a man of our party; the other was the thing that owned the mound. . . . It was horrible, I tell you! Those devils were lying there on our poor fellows, still and quiet, like dogs that have gorged on too much meat. Pff-f!

I remembered that I didn't have time to get sick at the stomach. You comprehend, I wanted to be going, to get away from there and bring back help to Gregory. The way we had come was mostly over a dry path through the swamp; I wondered if I could slip across the knoll and get back the same way. I started to find out, crawling on hands and knees, and holding my breath to keep from making a sound.

One of the mounds was close by, but I crawled past it without anything happen-

ing. After going a little further, I saw that, whichever way I turned, there was nothing for it but to creep between two more. I went forward inch by inch, cold sweat running down into my eyes. But the things lying on the mounds kept lying there. They were so close together that I had to crawl near enough to see that the mounds were heaps of turned-up raw clods; there was an open hole to the side of them. Dully, I wondered how much trouble it was for the things to pull the dirt in on top of them, when they crawled in their holes at sun-up. . . . My heart stood still when the one on my right made a noise in its throat, and moved a little. But it was quiet, after that, and I crept on.

There was not much farther to go until I would be on the path through the swamp. One more heap of raw clods I had to pass; but there was a clump of those low bushes near it, that would hide me as I passed. I reached the bushes, when a low squeaking noise made me sink flat on my stomach. I listened, my ears strained like my nerves, and heard it again —it seemed to come from over my head. I looked up. The white skeleton of a dead cypress stood on the other side of that grave the bushes grew by. Hanging to the lowest limb of the dead tree was a black something that looked like a bat—only it couldn't be. But it was! A bat as big as one of those buzzards, hanging there by its feet, and making overgrown squeaks, as bats do in their sleep.

I went around the bushes, hugging the ground. I had that bat all figured out, you understand—there had been only *one* black splotch on those clods under the dead cypress!

The bat was too much on my mind. I didn't notice where I was going. Something moved, out there ahead of me. I had run right onto another one of those vampire nests—two glowing eyes glared into mine, and a great wolf-thing—that I knew was *no* wolf!—rose up from on the other side of a hole, not twenty feet away!

The wolf snarled; I could see the gleam of its teeth in the dim moonlight. I knew that I was caught, that I had to run for it. There was no use in waiting there for that thing to come slobbering at my throat. The swamp was right ahead of me. I jumped up and dashed for it; and that wolf howled and dashed after me!

NEVER did I go anywhere as fast as I went from that place. The howls of the wolf behind me roused the knoll; a dozen howls answered, as if that many of the vampires took up the chase in the form of wolves. I had no thonght of path, now; but plunged in blind fear through the swamp. Once more I felt of the little silver medal of the Virgin hung around my neck; I felt it while I called silently on all the saints I could remember.

The wolf panted at my heels, and only my terrible fright kept me ahead of it for so long. It was bound to catch me—I could almost feel its hot breath on my back. I whirled, just as the beast put on an extra spurt, to spring at my shoulders. What good my bare hands could have done against that slavering terror, I can not imagine; but I threw them out, instinctively.

Something strange happened. One clenched hand had torn the blessed little medal from its cord around my neck. That was pure accident; and it was also accident that I cast that medal straight into the open maw of the mad beast as it sprang at me. For one terrible instant I felt the hot stinking breath of the thing in my face. Then it dropped down, bucking and making choking noises in its throat.

Whether the holiness of the little medal had anything to do with it, or whether it was a plain case of the wolf-thing choking on it, I neither knew nor cared. The main thing was for me to go on while the going was good; and I did.

Suddenly out of the darkness behind me came a furious squeaking, and something beat at my head, scratching my cheek. It was a great bat, like the one I had seen hanging to the dead cypress; and another joined it. Their little eyes blazed like red fires of hate, and the wings that beat at me were as heavy as a man's arms. They beat me down on my knees in the mud. The howling of the vampire wolves from the knoll came closer and closer through the swamp.

Without thinking, I dug handfuls of the soft mud at my knees, flinging the slimy stuff into the squeaking faces of the monster bats. It seemed to annoy them, for they squeaked furiously and darted up out of reach. I used the second before they swooped back, to spring to my feet and stagger on. Then they were on me again, their heavy wings battering at my head, the claws on the wings scratching my face until the blood ran down onto my neck. A great, fire-eyed owl swooped suddenly down and joined the bats. The werewolves were so close that I saw their dark forms, their flaming eyes; and there were other dark shapes running with them, like men, but with eyes that blazed like theirs.

I felt the clinging mud beneath my feet go thin, become water that wet my ankles. I could go no farther; the heavy wings pounded at my head, and I slipped and fell sprawling. Half choked with slimy water, I lay as I fell, lifting my head only to clear my nose and mouth. The water slowly crawled against my chin. Too exhausted to get up, or even to move or put my arms over my head to keep off those terrible wings, I waited without hope for an awful end.

Nothing happened. The wolves came dashing up, so close that I heard their panting, between yelps and snarling growls. Turning over on one elbow, I looked back and wondered. There were the wolves, whimpering and slavering, not more than a couple of yards from my feet; and the red-eyed things in the shapes of men snarled there with them. In the air a half-dozen of the bats whirled and squeaked, and a pair of huge black owls with fiery eyes like saucers whirled with them. But none of the swooping things passed over my head; none of the whining pack sprang at me!

Suddenly I knew what held them back. Years and years before, some one had sunk what was hoped to be an oil well, on this part of the island. The well came in, flowing nothing but salt water, and was left there without even the casing being pulled. After all these years, a little water still flows occasionally from that old well, and seeps through the swamp to the bayou. I lay in water that flowed, however shallow and sluggish—*and those vampires could not cross or enter running water, nor even fly above it!*

As long as I lay there I was safe! But I could not lie there until morning sent the devil pack scampering to its holes, because of Gregory. I must get back to him before it was too late. I knew that old well was not far from the fork of the bayou nearest Labranch. The things that whined for my blood could not follow except by scampering all the way around the head of that blessed water. Perhaps I could beat them to the bayou bank. Well, I would try! So!

I staggered to my feet, shaking my fist at the things like men and wolves that yowled their helpless hate at me, and at those other things that hooted and

squeaked, swooping above them through the trees.

I HAD my breath back now, was no longer weak and panting. Splashing out of the water, I started for the bayou as fast as my legs would take me. The thirsting things behind me yelped and raced off to round the old well, and so come at me again. God, how I ran! And thanked heaven as I ran, that there was not much except solid ground under my feet, so far, nor much undergrowth to slow my pace.

On I went, until I began to pant for breath again. Hope of reaching the bayou rose, for I knew it could not be much farther away, and I had not yet heard any more of the howling devils on my track. Just as I was about to slow down and take it easier, I heard them again, yelping in the distance but coming like the rush of wind. On I staggered; on to the bayou. I could sense the nearness of the saving stream, now. Two hundred yards ahead through the darkness . . . a hundred. . . .

Silently, without warning, the bats swarmed out of the swamp at my back. They came in a cloud, great devil owls with the monster bats, swooping, beating again at my head. I struggled on, on. . . .

The wolves came up; close behind them padded the things like men with eyes of fire. There were so many that they were in one another's way; and that was all that saved me from being torn to pieces at once. The great bats beat me with their wings, and tore at my face with hooked claws. One of the men vampires seized my wrist. This time, I knew that my end had surely come.

It was horrible to die like that, and with the bayou so near—horrible to die an unclean death from which I would rise up to be one of those things that howled for my blood! I went mad for a moment, and fought with such fury that I held them off a little longer, screaming as I fought. And then—even in my madness, I heard what it was that made those snarling things fall back and stand quivering, listening: I had screamed—*and the cries of many men answered from near by in the swamp!*

Even while we stood frozen, those fiends and I together, points of light showed faintly, moving through the trees. Lights—lanterns!—and the voices of *men!*

"Help!" I cried. "This way—help!"

Again my cry was answered; and some one fired three shots, as if they were a signal. Farther off, the baying of hounds sounded, and three rapid, answering shots.

The things around me, all but one of the werewolves, turned and rushed to meet the men who were running up with lights. The lone beast sprang in to finish me, but I fought so desperately, now that help was near, that it could not get at my throat. It knocked me from my feet, and we rolled and fought on the ground. I knew there could be but one end to this business; but shots rang out from close at hand, and yelps and howls mingled with shouts and curses of men. There was something—something of surprize and fear and pain—in the howls that made the beast leave off its slashing at me. It sprang back, bristling, its red eyes glaring redder than ever. Suddenly it let out one howl of its own, and raced to join the pack.

STAGGERING to my feet, I saw that a mad fight was on, there among the trees. Dark figures blazed away with guns that spit fire in the murk; others stabbed at wolf and bat and red-eyed vampires in the shapes of men, with pointed wooden stakes. Every time a

gun roared, there would be a shriek of agony, and a bat-thing would fall thudding to the ground; a wolf would spring high into the air, yowling its hate; or a thing like a man with blazing eyes would scream and fall writhing.

But the guns were few, and the men with stakes were not having things all their own way. Some of them fell, and I don't like to remember it. The vampires greatly outnumbered the others, you understand. But the baying of hounds came nearer and nearer. The dogs themselves burst into view, furious and eager to join the fight. They rushed in—and yelped with sudden terror when they found what things they had to fight. Here were creatures no dogs could stand against. The poor beasts turned and fled!

But other men followed the dogs; and two of these had guns that joined the few already roaring. Now the odds changed; and suddenly something else happened. Except for maybe a dozen that were lying still on the ground—there were *no* vampires! The bats shot off through the trees; wolves streaked into the bushes; the things that looked like men faded into a gust of wind that swept away into the swamp!

I stumbled forward, and some one came to meet me. It was Sheriff Desarde.

"Hey, you, Delaçroix!" he cried, "what's happened down here? Where's Gregory and the rest of your fellows?" Somebody had a canteen of water, and handed it to me. I gulped half of it down my dry throat before I started urging the sheriff toward that knoll where I had left Gregory with Nita. Tired as I was, I thought I could guide the sheriff and his men back over the way I had escaped, and I was in a hurry to go. I told Desarde what had taken place, in as few words as possible, and we set off at double time.

"They'll know we're coming, and not all of them were here," I warned the sheriff. Desarde was confident.

"I was in Baton Rouge this morning," he told me as we went, "and Legendre" —Rene Legendre is his chief deputy, you understand—"didn't know what to do when Gregory's men came in with his note about old Jules Landry's disappearance, and saying he was going to go into the swamp and round up the "gipsies." I got back to town just before another man came in from your camp, saying you fellows hadn't come back. It was seven o'clock then, and I knew what had happened—I was a grown man when Placide Duboin married that Nita, and I know as much about her as anybody!

"I got a gunsmith to jerk the lead out of enough bullets for a half-dozen guns, and put silver in them, instead. That was all we had time to wait for; so I gave the rest of them some poles I had, already sharpened, ready to stake out some pole beans I'm growing; we took them by the church and wet them plenty, in the font of holy water . . . I got a pint flask of holy water on my hip, too."

You can believe me, I was glad the sheriff was born in this country, and had more sense about some things than men who thought they were a lot smarter—Gregory, for instance! So!

WE CAME to the knoll, all right; and a lot quicker than I had been in getting away. The place was dark, but we could see red eyes glaring at us out of the blackness. The vampires were there waiting for us, ready to fight for their nest.

"Gregory!" Desarde shouted; "where are you?" There was no answer, either then or when the sheriff yelled again, louder. We hesitated, and Desarde called for all the men with lanterns to bring them to the front. Then something swept down at us, and sharp claws raked my face. The sheriff cursed and fired at

something that slashed at his own head. It was like a signal; the fight was on.

Something snarled and rushed at me. There was a lantern on the ground in back of me, and I recognized, with satisfaction, the old devil who had brought me to the knoll in the first place. I had one of the stakes Desarde had brought, and it was pointed like a toothpick. I jabbed the old one in the stomach with it. He howled and hopped back, but started for me again.

"Aho, *sale vieux!*" I told him; "You want a better one, I see—well, take it!" And I drove it at his breast with all my strength. Uh-h! Did you ever drive a sharp pole into anybody's chest, vampire or otherwise? Neither did I, until then, but you comprehend that it was not nice . . . the way he *crunched!*

(Wait till I get a drink on that! You——? Oh, very well then! You never pushed a sharp pole into anything that crunched and squalled!)

Well! That old fellow flopped down like a bundle of rags. I pulled my stake out of him and jabbed up at a bat's stomach. It squealed and wheeled away. Snarling and growling things fought all over the place. The lanterns on the ground made just enough light to see a little; some of them were overturned and broken.

A wolfish shape sprang snarling into my face. I jabbed at it with my pole and missed, and then I was down. Desarde's gun roared, and the *loup-garou* went limp on top of me. I pushed it off and scrambled up. The sheriff was blazing away only whenever he was sure of a hit; he had none of the silver bullets to waste. Suddenly the fight died away. There was nothing there for us to fight! As before, the vampire pack had melted into the forest.

"Now," I reminded, "we find Gregory—and Nita!"

Desarde called a half-dozen men to bring lanterns, and told the rest to hurry and surround the knoll, and be on the lookout for a return of the pack. I rushed to the mound where I had left Nita and Gregory, the sheriff and the men with lanterns running with me. Not sure of what to expect, but in fear that Nita had run into the swamp with her pack, I pushed through the bushes.

WHATEVER I thought to find, it was not what the lanterns at my back showed. Gregory was on his knees, holding tight to Nita, who struggled and fought in his arms like a wild thing. Silent, panting, she clawed at his face, and he hunched his chin tight on her shoulder to protect himself from her sharp teeth.

"Quit fighting," Gregory pleaded, "these are my friends, and they won't hurt you."

"Let me go, fool!" Nita screamed at him. *"Let me go!"*

Why she was not able to fade from his arms and whisk herself away, what had passed between her and Gregory that may have made her powerless in his arms, I do not know. But Gregory held tight to her, though she screamed now and fought like a mad thing. Desarde brushed past me.

"Let her loose, Greg!" the sheriff cried—"Move out of the way and I'll quiet her with a silver bullet."

Nita screamed louder; the howls of her pack ranged in closer. Gregory jerked his head around at us, unmindful that Nita seized the opportunity to bite savagely at his exposed neck.

"No!" he cried, in startled alarm. "She's mine from now on—I'll take care of her, and you won't have to worry about her, now. Go away and let us alone!"

What do you know about that? I thought Gregory was playing up to Nita

so she wouldn't watch me, and I could get away—and he meant it, all along! He had actually fallen for that bloodsucking *thing!* He put his body between her and Desarde, and managed to stagger to his feet with her kicking in his arms.

The sheriff thought Gregory was crazy. So did I, as far as that goes, and I think so, now—no man could take a vampire in his arms and keep sane! Desarde was afraid to fire at Nita, for fear of hurting Gregory. He seemed to have a sudden idea; for I saw him grab at his hip pocket.

"Let's see what this'll do!" he muttered, pulling out the flask of holy water. "I can sprinkle this on both of them."

He slopped the water from the uncorked bottle on the pair, wetting Gregory as much as Nita. Greg started away with her, taking long steps and not seeming to mind the water; but she shrieked and howled, twisting as if Desarde had poured acid on her.

"Close in!" the sheriff cried to us. "Take her away from him and let's finish this!"

Gregory heard him, and began to run toward the swamp with Nita. Desarde started to jump after him. Then, without any warning, Nita's pack burst onto the knoll from out of the woods, and hell broke loose again. Howling, snarling and squeaking, fiends like wolves and bats and men flung themselves upon us, and between us and the poor fool who carried the mistress of them all.

We were hard pressed for a minute, and two of our men went down and never got up. Poor fellows! But heavy odds were with us in point of numbers, since we had killed at least a dozen in the first two fights; and there were still a few silver bullets in the guns. The vampires gave way, and then we realized that they were really beaten, and only fought to keep us away from Gregory and Nita.

We punched and jabbed with the sharpened stakes; now and then a gun blazed, whenever a sure shot offered. The blackness of the swamp was beginning to take on a gray tinge. Under the threat of dawn, the howls of the things became uneasy. We pushed on after Gregory with less resistance. The light grew, and we could see him staggering along ahead. Nita sagged limp and dangling in his arms.

The things swirling around us, just out of reach, began to change their snarls to whimpers. Two of them ran up to Gregory, fluttering around him like two frightened old women. He shook them off and tottered on. On toward the banks of the bayou, that showed through the grayness, not far away.

There was sudden silence around us, for a moment. Snarls and whimpers hushed. Then, as if at a signal, the vampire pack whirled and raced away behind us.

Understanding flashed through my brain; and it was queer how I felt a little touch of pity for those things. They could not face the sun, and scampered away to their holes, where we would find them with our stakes before another night. . . .

Gregory stood swaying, facing us with his back to the bayou. We came slowly closer, seeing that his face was drawn and weary. He carried dead weight that must have felt like lead in his arms; Nita hung limp, moaning.

"Get back!" Gregory demanded hoarsely. "You can't shoot me, and I won't let you touch her. I'm too tired for it, but if you come closer, I'll jump in the bayou and try to swim across with her—if I drown, it'll be the same as if you murdered me."

Desarde stepped slowly forward, empty hands outstretched, intending to try

reasoning with him. Gregory misunderstood, turned to jump, even while the sheriff cried to him to wait. Nita jerked suddenly to life, shrieking as she saw the water under them.

"No!" she screamed. For a fraction of a second, while Gregory tottered on the bank, she bit and clawed, and fought to tear his arms away. Desarde ran toward them, and we with him. But we were too late. Nita gave one last awful scream of fear, as Gregory toppled with her to the water. . . .

There was a blinding flash, a blue-white sheet of flame that burned up the air we breathed. It burned to the back of our eyeballs. For long minutes we stood there, arms across our eyes, blinded, and afraid to move. Finally that passed, and we could see again. But there was nothing upon the surface of the bayou; the black water flowed on as it always had: creeping darkly toward the bay. What happened, or how, I don't pretend to know. Nor why. But all my life I've heard it said, *vampires can cross no flowing water!* Gregory had tried to take Nita. . . . And that flame; and they were gone. . . .

God! Let's have a drink!

* * * * *

I AM interested in folklore, and had listened to Delacroix more for that reason than any other. Otherwise, I can not explain why my patience burst bounds no sooner.

"I don't want a drink, and you've already had too many." I was angry, and let him have it straight. "I heard talk in the town about a wild fight the sheriff's posse had with a gang of gipsies on the island; and then you waste my time with a version that would make Munchausen green with envy."

Delacroix laughed shortly. "You don't expect the people who know the truth to tell it to outsiders, do you? And be called crazy, or liars like you're calling me?"

"Anyway," I retorted, "you'd better sober up and be on the job in the morning. If your past record wasn't unusually good, I'd fire you now!"

"Oh!" Delacroix exclaimed innocently, "I forgot to tell you: When we went back to the knoll to take care of what was left to do, I hung back and did some private digging of my own! Old Placide's money was there, just as Nita said. . . ."

Reaching into a pocket, he drew out a wallet. As he carelessly flipped the contents with his thumb, a sheaf of old currency showed for a minute, like the open corner of a fan. The bills were faded and dirty, and their size proved them of old-fashioned issue. Old and soiled they may have been, but the four numerals in their corners seemed very vivid to my startled eyes.

"Just a tin box and a little oilskin-wrapped pack of greenbacks," Delacroix observed. "But *big* ones! *So!* The only reason I'm here is because I can't get a train to New Orleans for a couple more hours. . . .

"You better have a drink before you go? All right! Whether you do, or whether you don't"—he looked up, his grin taking the malice from his parting shot—"you take your job and go hop in the bayou—and see what happens to *you!*"

The Eye of Truth

By ARLTON EADIE

A fascinating story of a Greek who found strange powers in the ruins of a temple in Boeotia

"*MESSIEURS, mesdames, faites vos jeux!*"

With a sharp twist of his right hand the croupier set the roulette wheel in motion, and a moment later he threw the little ivory ball upon the spinning disk. A tense, breathless hush fell upon the circle of well-dressed men and women seated round the green-covered table; the only sound to be heard was the merry clicking of the tiny ivory ball as it leaped and spun in its dance of fortune.

Gradually the wheel slowed down until the alternating red and black sections could be faintly distinguished—slower still, until one could see the blur of the numbers on the outer rim of white—slower and slower, until the eye could follow the tiny white ball as it circled round in one of the black sections of the wheel, and read the number marked upon the rim.

"*Dix, noir, pair et manque!*" announced the droning voice of the croupier.

For a few seconds he plied his rake deftly, whisked away the stakes of those who had lost, pushing their winnings across to those on whom fortune had smiled.

"The Count wins again!" whispered one woman to her neighbor. "*Ma foi!* but he has the luck of *le grand diable* himself!"

The other woman sighed enviously as she watched her few notes go to swell the great pile opposite the man referred to.

"Ah, but he is one who has the courage to flout Dame Fortune by turning his back on her while she smiles upon him. See—he is about to leave the table."

"*Vraiment!* he can well afford to be content," exclaimed the first speaker. "Tonight he has won a fortune!"

"Last night he did the same—and the night before, too. Many times have I watched him, tempted to follow his play, yet fearing that such luck can not hold. But it does hold. *Tenez!* it is beyond belief! Who is he?"

The other woman raised her pencilled eyebrows and shrugged.

"Ah, many people have asked that question without finding an answer to it. The man is a mystery. Nobody knows his name, so the *habitués* of the tables have invented one for him. They call him 'Count Roulette'."

Meanwhile the object of their conversation had risen leisurely to his feet, swept together his winnings and thrust them carelessly into his pocket. He was a tall and extremely handsome man, although well past the prime of life, if one might judge by the snowy whiteness of his hair and the long pointed beard which covered the lower portion of his face. Yet his skin, though pale as old ivory, showed scarcely a trace of a wrinkle, while his dark eyes shone beneath their heavy brows with a keen vivacity that seemed almost youthful.

The moment he rose there was a rush of bystanders to occupy the "lucky chair;" but he did not even glance toward them as he crossed to the door leading to the atrium, where all hats and coats must be

"Before the echoes of the explosion had died away I had drawn my own gun and shot him dead."

deposited. Before he could reach it his arm was seized violently from behind.

"Pardon, *monsieur,*" the speaker, a total stranger to him, was quivering with eagerness and excitement. "You play on a system—yes? I will pay your own price for the secret of it!"

The man who had won a fortune paused and regarded the other for a moment through the old-fashioned glass which he usually wore suspended from his neck by a fine gold chain.

"I have no system, *monsieur,*" he said coldly. His French was perfect, but he spoke it with a slight intonation which seemed to indicate it was not his native tongue.

The man's grip tightened on his arm.

"No system?" he whispered in a voice of hoarse incredulity. "Yet you win, and win, and win——"

"True, *monsieur.*" For the first time that evening a faint smile lightened the habitual sadness of the bearded man's face. "I win because—unfortunately—I can not lose. I have the honor of wishing you good-night—and better fortune."

He released his arm with a quick movement and, before the other could recover from his astonishment, passed through

the swinging doors into the vestibule. Tendering his numbered *vestaire* check, he received his hat and overcoat, and as the attendant was helping him to don the latter, one of the frock-coated officials approached and whispered in his ear.

"Would it not be well if a gendarme accompanies *monsieur* to his hotel? The hour is late, and you have a large sum of money in your possession, and there have been instances where players have been robbed of their winnings——"

"Pray have no fear," interrupted the Count. "I have a . . . a friend not far away."

"As *monsieur* pleases."

THE official returned to his post in the gaming-room and the other stepped out into the palm-shaded path that led through the gardens of the Casino. As he disappeared, two men, who had quitted the tables a few seconds before him, emerged from the shadows and followed noiselessly in his wake.

Stepping out briskly and inhaling with evident relief the cool sea breeze which swept in from the Mediterranean—doubly refreshing after the vitiated, scent-laden atmosphere of the crowded gaming-rooms—the stranger soon reached the curving terrace overlooking the Pointe Focianana. Here he came to a halt and, lighting a cigar, leant his arms on the stone balustrade and contemplated the scene before him.

Immediately below was the little square harbor, with its twin lighthouses guarding the entrance, their lights, red on one side and green on the other, mirrored with scarcely a break in the smooth, unruffled waters. Beyond the harbor towered the fortress-crowned Rock of Monaco, ancient, grim, rugged and gray; its siege-scarred walls and bastions looking down as though in savage contempt at the ultra-modern Casino which, glittering with a thousand lights and looking as dainty as the white ornament on a bridal cake, faced it across the bay.

A faint crunching sound on the gravel path behind him caused him to swing round. Confronting him, their faces concealed by masks, were two men, the foremost holding a revolver aimed straight at his breast.

"Your money, *monsieur,* or you die!"

The man with the white beard leaned back against the balustrade and laughed softly.

"Pardon my mirth, *messieurs,* but one would imagine that you had studied your—er—profession at some *opéra bouffe*——"

The right hand of the threatened man made a quick movement toward his breast, but it was merely to grasp the curious eyeglass which dangled on its gold chain. Raising it to his eye, he surveyed each man in turn as coolly and dispassionately as though he were inspecting two rare specimens in a museum. So unexpected was that calm scrutiny that the man with the pistol shrank back and stood irresolute. But the other came forward with a muttered curse.

"*Nom de Dieu,* why do you waste time? Put a bullet into the old *cochon* if he won't hand over——"

Again the man with the white beard laughed.

"Your threats are empty, *messieurs,* as empty as the weapon you threaten me with. Your revolver is not loaded!"

The two men stared at the speaker for an instant in speechless amazement.

"You are surprized that I know that," the old man continued, "but there are many more things about you that I know equally well. You"—he pointed to the man who held the revolver—"are Raoul Lecontier, otherwise known as 'Le Lapin,'

an apache badly wanted by the Sûreté Générale of Paris for the murder of the baker in the Rue du Petit Camas. Your companion is Anton Grezan, otherwise known as——."

"*Mille tonnerres!* You know too much, old man, to be allowed to live! Money or no money, he mustn't get away from here!"

Pocketing his empty pistol, the ruffian slid a knife from his belt, and slowly and cautiously the two began to approach their victim. But the old man had no intention of allowing himself to be cornered. Throwing his hat in the face of the foremost man, he dashed off to the right and tore along a path which stretched dim beneath the arching palms and sub-tropical undergrowth, his assailants in hot pursuit.

"Help!" he cried, raising his voice and speaking in English. "Help me! I am beset by thieves!"

With a promptitude that could scarcely have been excelled had the summons been awaited, a figure rose from one of the stone seats and placed itself in fighting attitude between pursued and pursuers. For an instant the two apaches paused; then, with bared knives held ready for the deadly upward lunge, they circled round to attack the newcomer from both sides simultaneously.

But the man was evidently fully alive to the importance of getting his attack in first. Instead of making a retreat before such odds, he sidestepped quickly and with the force and dexterity of a trained boxer, sent a lightning right and left to the jaw of the nearest man.

"You're down for the count, anyway, my beauty!" he muttered as the Frenchman sagged forward and pitched headlong on to the gravel, his knife falling from his hand. Giving the weapon a kick which sent it slithering well out of reach, the victor turned his attention to the remaining man, but this time he waited for his opponent's move.

It was not long in coming.

"*Mort de Dieu!*" screamed Le Lapin, springing forward with upraised knife. "Dog of an Englishman—you die!"

"Not on your life, *monsieur!*" came back with a mocking laugh.

What happened subsequently was entirely beyond the apache's experiences of such encounters. The vague impression he retained in his mind was that his intended victim was in two places at once, but before he had time to give this extraordinary phenomenon due attention a fist shot out of nowhere in particular and landed with the force of a battering-ram behind his left ear in what was—although the recipient knew it not—a very scientific and perfect "cross counter."

"Two!" said the victor, as the gallant Lapin went to join his prostrate accomplice. "And now I should be glad to know what all the fuss is about."

The white-bearded man, who had been an interested spectator of the fight, now stepped forward.

"These two gentlemen very kindly offered to relieve me of a few thousand francs that I had won at the tables," he said with a slight smile. "When I declined to allow them to act as my bankers, they tried to kill me."

"Shall I hand them over to the police?" asked the young man.

The other surveyed the limp forms of his late antagonists, then shook his head.

"I think they have learnt their lesson not to molest inoffensive strangers. I will drop a hint in the right quarter to insure that Monte Carlo becomes too hot to hold them another twenty-four hours. Really," he paused and regarded his rescuer through his strange eyeglass, "I am rather grateful to the rogues, since they have

been the means of my becoming acquainted with a young artist whom I have long wished to know."

"Meaning myself?" The surprize in the young man's voice was too deep to be disguised.

"Exactly. As a matter of fact, I ran down this rather dark and forbidding path well knowing that I should find you seated at the farther end, and I may add, well knowing, too, that you would not fail me in my hour of need."

The other gave a laugh of frank incredulity.

"Your good opinion of me is very flattering, sir, but I fear you must be mistaken. How could you have foreseen that I should be in the Casino gardens at this hour of the night? Why, I'm positive that I have spoken to no one of my intention to come here; in fact I did not make up my mind to do so until——"

"Exactly a quarter past five this afternoon, when you were packing up your paints and easel after completing your picture of the distant Citadel of Monaco."

They had fallen into step together and had been walking along the avenue which runs parallel to the Quai de Plaisance, but as the older man made this extraordinary remark the young artist stopped dead and stared at him in amazement.

"How could you possibly have known what was in my thoughts?" he cried.

The other shrugged slightly, and a wistful smile rose to his bearded lips.

"I am a man who knows many things that are hidden in the hearts of others," he said slowly, "though it is doubtful whether I am to be envied my knowledge. For instance, although you are living in an obscure lodging in the unfashionable quarter of the town, I know that you are Frank Hartley, the only son of Matthew Hartley, the millionaire oil-king."

"Quite correct," the young man admitted. "But such information might have been gained by a few discreet inquiries. I must have more convincing proof than that if I am to believe in your boasted omniscience. Tell me, for instance, the most important thing that I intend to do tomorrow."

The old man raised his eyeglass to his eye and favored Frank Hartley with a long stare.

"The most important thing that you intend to do tomorrow, Mr. Hartley—although you have not yet quite made up your mind to take the plunge—is to ask Lady Vanda Delafer to become your wife."

The statement seemed to strike the young man speechless. For a moment he stood rigid and motionless with sheer amazement, and the other went on:

"If an old man may offer a little advice to one younger than himself, I would counsel you to beware of putting too much trust in new-found friends—no matter how beautiful and fascinating. Remember that, although your father has disinherited you because you chose to follow art instead of leading the idle, useless life of a fashionable man about town—remember, I repeat, that he may relent before he dies, and Frank Hartley, heir to the Hartley millions, may succeed in love where Frank Hartley, as the penniless artist, would be rejected with scorn."

Hartley started forward and seized the old man's shoulder.

"Who are you?" he demanded fiercely.

"Men call me 'Count Roulette,' and that name will serve as well as any other," the unknown answered with a shrug. "My home is that large steam yacht, the *Veritas*, which you can see moored at the quay yonder. As for my occupation—

well, I can only describe myself as a seeker."

"A seeker?" Frank repeated wonderingly. "What do you seek, then? Is it love? —fame?—riches?"

With a slow, inscrutable smile, Count Roulette shook his head.

"I seek none of those things, my friend, but rather a thing that one might imagine to be much easier to find. Yet I find my quest strangely difficult—so difficult, indeed, that until this night I have almost despaired of accomplishing it. But now I have hopes——" He paused and with a slow, impressive movement raised to his eye the curious eyeglass which dangled on its gold chain, intently scrutinizing the young man's features as he muttered to himself, "Yes, most decidedly I have hopes—now."

Then, dropping the glass, he raised his hat with a courtly, old-fashioned bow and hurried away, walking with rapid strides down the inclined road which led to the harbor.

Frank Hartley watched him until he turned the corner, a puzzled frown on his rather handsome features.

"He must be crazed—obsessed by a fantastic quest," he muttered as he turned away. "Yet the poor old fellow looked so kindly — so intelligent ——" He started suddenly as his thoughts flew back to the old man's strange words. "But all the same it's mighty queer how he came by his knowledge of my private affairs, and was able to guess my intentions regarding Lady Vanda. Yes, it's very queer . . . I wonder. . . ."

He pondered deeply over the problem as he made his way through the silent streets to his lodging in the older and less fashionable district known as La Condamine. But when he fell asleep that night he had advanced no farther toward the solution of the mystery which surrounded the strange, white-bearded man whose amazing luck had gained for him the title of "Count Roulette."

IN THE daintily decorated breakfast room of a *suite de luxe* in the most exclusive and expensive hotel in Monte Carlo, two people were seated the following morning. Neither of them seemed to have much appetite for the breakfast which the waiter had just set out on the table in the window overlooking the sea. The girl, a strikingly handsome blond attired in a wrapper of coral-pink silk, was puffing at a perfumed cigarette while she manipulated a cocktail-shaker with the facility of an expert.

There was a strong facial likeness between her and the man who was lounging on the settee, glancing through a Continental edition of an English newspaper—a likeness which was rendered even more striking by his effeminate air, drawling utterance, and languid movements.

The Honorable Bobby Delafer was two years older than his sister Vanda, but hers was the dominating will, and in the not infrequent discussions as to the best ways and means of what in less exalted society is termed "raising the wind," hers was the casting vote which decided their tactics. For, although the ancestral heads of the house of Delafer had bequeathed to their descendants an ancient and—outwardly, at least—unsullied title, there had been no fat rent-roll accompanying it.

The present Lord Delafer, the tenth of his line, had early in his career evinced a partiality for high stakes at cards, and this taste, combined with a certain novel and dexterous method of manipulating them, had caused him to resign his commission in a crack cavalry regiment at the urgent and very caustic request of his commanding officer. At the present time he was drawing a very modest and precarious in-

come by allowing his name to figure on the lists of directors of sundry newly fledged mining companies. To his two offspring he had given his fatherly advice and blessing before launching them on the sea of life, to trim their sails by such favoring winds as fate might send, in the hope of berthing in the snug and secure haven of a rich marriage.

To the Honorable Bobby this much-desired consummation seemed as far off as ever; the enterprising Vanda, however, had at one time seemed (to maintain the nautical simile) almost on the point of hooking her anchor firmly in the golden shoals accumulated by old Matthew Hartley. With infinite patience she had cultivated the acquaintance of his only son, Frank, even going to the length of taking lessons in art—a thing she heartily detested. To the generous and unsuspicious young student she appeared like a kindred soul. Friendship ripened quickly into that *camaradarie* which prevails in the studios, and that in turn ripened — on Frank's part at least—to a deep and abiding love. Then, with the prize almost within her grasp, came the bombshell which shattered her hopes. Quite casually, as though it were a thing of but little importance, Frank happened to mention that his father had quarrelled with him because he had chosen to become an artist, and that his hopes of inheriting the bulk of the old man's millions were very slender.

Frank had been considerably puzzled by her sudden and unaccountable coolness toward him, but little did he realize the real reason for it. Indifferent to wealth himself, he credited the adorable Vanda with a like disinterestedness. He might have seen fit to revise his opinion of that lady had he seen her that morning as she filled two tall glasses with the fog-colored liquor from the shaker, and raised one of them in a sardonic toast.

"Here's to our next venture, Bobby—and may it prove a more profitable stunt than angling for a paint-slinging fool of a pauper!"

The Honorable Bobby shook his head slightly as he sipped his cocktail.

"Not quite a pauper, Vanda," he corrected. "He has a bit of an income——"

"Yes—enough to pay my hair-dressing and beauty-parlor bills." There was a sneer of her carmined lips that revealed little cruel lines at the corners of her mouth. "No, I'm afraid the dear innocent Frank Hartley is a back number as far as I am concerned. I might have been able to tolerate him as a husband with a million or two to burn, but he'd drive me crazy as a love-in-a-cottage partner. I'll write to him this morning and tell him that I'm through—that I'm 'wedded to my art'—like he is, the poor fish!"

Bobby, who had been listlessly glancing down the columns of the paper, now looked up with a sudden exclamation.

"Hold on, my dear. You're travelling a bit too rapid. I'd leave that note unwritten for a day or two, if I were you."

"Why?" she demanded harshly. "If you imagine for a moment that I'm going to waste my chances on——"

"Waste nothing!" he jerked out sharply. "Just read that."

He laid the paper before her and pointed to a paragraph half-way down the middle page.

Vanda snatched up the paper and hastily scanned the headline, her breast rising and falling rapidly, her hands trembling with an excitement which she did not attempt to control.

MILLIONAIRE DIES INTESTATE
DRAMATIC COLLAPSE OF
MR. MATTHEW HARTLEY IN OFFICE
SEARCH FOR MISSING HEIR

The actual report was brief, merely intimating that the well-known oil magnate had died of a heart attack while attending to his private correspondence in his London office. Then followed the usual outline of the dead man's career, with a list of the various companies and combines in which he had held a controlling interest. It was the final paragraph which caused a wave of wild elation to mount to Vanda Delafer's brain:

The solicitors of the late Mr. Hartley have made known the extraordinary news that the dead millionaire has left no will, in which case it is to be presumed that the whole of his immense fortune will devolve on his only son. Although his actual whereabouts is at present unknown, Mr. Frank Hartley is believed to be travelling on the Continent. Inquiries are being set on foot, and he is requested to communicate without delay with Messrs. Harrow and Brett, solicitors, of Gray's Inn Square, London.

SHE tossed the paper aside and sprang to her feet, her eyes shining, her sharp white teeth showing in a smile of triumph.

"So Frank will be rich after all!" she cried. "And I was about to give him up!"

Her brother shrugged his narrow shoulders as he gave a smile of conscious superiority.

"Your impulsiveness will be your ruin one of these days, my dear sister," he drawled. "Lucky for you that you have me to give you a little brotherly guidance now and then. If it had not been for me you would have let that poor fish wriggle off the hook after having played him so patiently."

"No fear of that happening—now!" The grating laugh which accompanied her words seemed strangely at variance with her delicate beauty. I'm willing to bet that I'll be murmuring a coy 'Yes' to his proposal some time today."

The Honorable Bobby favored his sister with an approving grin.

"Leave it until the shades of evening are softly falling—he will feel more romantic then," he advised with the certitude of an adept in such matters. "But for heaven's sake don't let him know you've seen that report of his father's death."

Vanda received his advice as though it were a personal affront.

"Think I was born yesterday?" she asked in a tone of acid reproof. "Leave it to me, boy. I reckon there's no flies on your little sister when it comes to vamping a simp like that!"

A discreet tap on the door interrupted their conversation at this stage, and a moment later one of the hotel valets made his appearance.

"A young lady wishes to speak with *madame*," he said.

"Oh yes, show her up." Vanda turned to her brother with a little laugh when the man had gone. "I've got a surprize for you, Bobby. You never suspected that I was a perfect unknown genius of an artist, did you? Well, I am—or perhaps I should say, I'm going to be one."

"Good lord!" Bobby gasped in surprize. "Why, the only thing I've ever seen you paint is your face!"

"Don't be horrid, or I shan't tell you how clever I've been. You know how Frank absolutely raves over anything connected with art? Well, I'm going to paint some lovely pictures for him to gloat over."

Bobby shook his head with a puzzled air. "I can't imagine you painting anything that Frank Hartley is likely to gloat over."

"You foolish boy, I'm not going to paint them *myself*—I'm going to pose as a genius by proxy. I saw a girl making sketches on the Corniche Road yesterday—just the style of thing that Frank raves about—so I arranged to buy a few of her pictures, so as to pass them off as my own work——"

"But it's rather risky. Supposing——"

"Hush! here she is."

The girl who entered was slim and dark, and of such remarkable beauty that even the blasé Bobby stared. Here was a face almost Madonna-like in its serene purity, with a clear complexion that had been toned and ripened to rich damask coloring by long hours in the open air, and with steady blue-gray eyes which looked so transparently sincere. Although she might have passed for a girl still in her teens, Mary Deane was twenty-one, and her short experience of the world had not been free either from struggle or hardship. Adversity might have robbed her of the illusions of youth, but in their place it had given her poise, and a dogged confidence in her own ability to win through.

"Ah, good morning, Miss Deane." Vanda's tone was slightly more gracious than that which she used when addressing her maid. "You have brought the sketches, I see."

"Yes, and I have also brought the one I was working on when you spoke to me yesterday."

Mary Deane opened the leather portfolio and took out four pictures and laid them on the table. Bobby uttered a sound which was intended to express admiration.

"By Jove, I've never seen anything I like better." His gaze was not on the pictures as he spoke. "I could sit here and feast my eyes for hours on such beauty."

The girl made a slight inclination of her head.

"It is indeed a pleasure to meet such an ardent admirer—of coast scenery," she said in a voice which betrayed a slight tinge of irony. "There are so many other attractions in Monte Carlo, that to many visitors the natural beauties pass almost unnoticed."

Catching her brother's eye, Vanda gave him a warning frown as he was about to launch into another enthusiastic panegyric.

"I'm rather glad that you do not sign your work," was her own highly practical remark. "Personally, I think it's much nicer to have unsigned pictures hanging on the walls—unless, of course, they are by well-known artists—and, after all, it is the painting itself, not the signature, that matters."

The ghost of a smile touched the lips of Mary Deane as she listened. Hard and practical experience had taught her different, and often in the past she had seen a mediocre work bearing the signature of a well-known R. A. eagerly snapped up while a better work by an unknown artist had failed to find a buyer.

"Undoubtedly a famous name has its value," she contented herself with remarking. "But I fear that your ladyship is mistaken in assuming that my pictures are quite unsigned. If you look very closely in the corner of each picture you will see a tiny monogram, M. D., my own initials."

"By Jove, sounds quite doctorish — what?" broke in Bobby.

Vanda Delafer's brows met in a frown of annoyance as she bent over the pictures, carefully examining the spot indicated by the young artist. At last she shook her head.

"I can not see the monogram," she said.

"It is very difficult to make out," Mary explained. "For instance, in this picture it is composed of the stems of the clump of grass in the foreground; in this, it is markings on the fragment of rock. It is a queer little notion of my own to mark my pictures in this way," Mary Deane went on with a smile, "a sort of a compromise between a signed picture and an unsigned one. I suppose I must have just

sufficient of the artistic temperament to prevent me writing my name in full, and just too little to allow me to leave it out altogether."

Vanda took another long look and a sigh of relief escaped her lips.

"But it is quite unnoticeable unless one looked for the monogram," she said.

"Oh, quite."

"Then it really does not matter whether it is there or not." She placed the pictures together and crossed to the bureau in the corner of the room. "I will buy the four pictures, Miss Deane. I think you said you valued them at ten guineas each? Very well, I will write you out a check now."

She seated herself at the bureau, took up a pen, and then started to search frantically, pulling out the drawers and rummaging among the littered papers.

"Dear me, wherever could I have put my check-book? One of those careless maids must have mislaid it." She turned to the girl with a charming smile of apology. "I'll have to send the check on to you, after all. Will you just scribble the address where you are staying, so that I can send the money on to you when my check-book turns up? It's frightfully annoying, but I hope you won't mind the slight delay?"

"Not in the least, Lady Delafer."

Mary Deane wrote down the address and Vanda dismissed her with a gracious smile and the assurance that she would receive the check by the first available post.

"Dear little trustful soul!" said Bobby, after the door had closed on the unsuspicious girl. "Where does she hang out?"

He craned forward to read the address, but his sister quickly snatched it away.

"You'll please keep out of this little business, Bobby," she said sharply. "If Mary Deane is trustful now, she wouldn't be trustful long after you had started amusing yourself with her."

The Honorable Bobby scowled sulkily as he lit a cigarette.

"All right. But it certainly amuses me to hear *you* moralizing, my dear Vanda," he answered with a sneer. "How long do you think she would have trusted you if you'd written out that check? I know the amount is only £42, but your present bank balance is something of a minus quantity."

There was a derisive smile on Lady Vanda's painted lips, and a light of sly triumph glinted between her heavy eyelids.

"Have no fear of that, my dear Bobby," she said calmly. "There will be plenty of money in the bank to meet that check when it is presented. From now onward nothing can mar my plans. I am determined that I shall be Frank Hartley's wife within a month, and I defy the devil himself to prevent me——"

Bobby's warning cry caused her to swing round. Her confident boast ended in a low gasp of dismay.

Framed in the open doorway, still and silent as a granite sphinx as he stood regarding her through a quaint, old-fashioned eyeglass, was the mysterious man known as Count Roulette.

For nearly a minute there was silence in the dainty room, silence that was broken only by the ticking of the gilt clock on the mantelpiece and the quick breathing of the startled girl. Then, with an ugly oath, Bobby sprang to his feet and advanced toward the intruder.

"What do you mean by sneaking in here like that?" he demanded furiously. "This is a private suite—not the smoke-room!"

Count Roulette dropped his eyeglass

and bent his head in a little deferential bow.

"I must beg of you to forgive a foolish old man for his unintentional intrusion," he said in perfect English. "As some slight excuse for my offense, I may mention the fact that I knocked twice before entering, but unfortunately I mistook Lady Vanda's somewhat loudly voiced remarks for an invitation to enter."

"What do you want, anyway?" queried Bobby, eyeing him with a suspicious scowl.

"I came here in the hope of meeting Mr. Frank Hartley."

"Are you a friend of his?" Vanda asked quickly.

The Count made a gesture of polite deprecation as he shook his head.

"I can scarcely claim to be that, Lady Vanda. I spoke to him for the first time last night."

Vanda heaved a long sigh of relief. The man was a mere casual acquaintance, and it was hardly likely that Frank would have told him about his private affairs. She hastened to switch the conversation into a different channel.

"I have heard about your sensational winnings at the tables, Count—indeed, who has not done so?" she said with a dazzling smile. "Were you equally lucky last night?"

The old man's fingers strayed toward the dangling eyeglass as he nodded gravely.

"Yes, *mademoiselle,* I was indeed fortunate."

"Did you break the bank?" Bobby asked eagerly.

The Count spread his hands, at the same time giving a humorous lift of his eyebrows.

"*Hélas!* in these days one can do nothing so sensational as 'break the bank,' for when the croupier of one table finds his funds are running low, he quietly sends to one of the other tables for more money. Still, I have no reason to complain of my fortune last night."

"I'd give a good deal to know the system that you play on, Count," said Vanda, shooting a keen glance at his impassive face. "They say you have a marvelous *flair* for the exact moment to begin your play."

Again that slow smile broke the sphinx-like calm of the old man's features.

"More important than that, my dear Lady Vanda, I know the right moment when the game gets too difficult to play with safety—a knowledge which is of value in even more risky pastimes than roulette."

Lightly as the words were spoken, Lady Vanda sensed a subtle note of warning underlying them. For an instant she felt a strange and unreasoning fear of this soft-spoken man with the bright yet inscrutable eyes, but she dismissed the passing presentiment with a careless laugh.

"Really, my dear Count, you are so sure of your knowledge of the future that I'm tempted to think you must have dealings in the Black Art," she said with a faint sneer. "You speak with all the confidence of an ancient oracle!"

"Your ladyship may regard me as one, if the idea affords any amusement." Again that baffling smile touched his lips as he added, "An oracle of Ancient Greece."

With a sudden start the suspicion flashed over her that the old man was merely talking to gain time until Frank Hartley should arrive. Her smile was sweeter than ever as she rose to her feet to end the interview.

"Just at present I'm too frightfully busy to consult oracles of any description," she said, extending her hand. "Must you really be going now?"

The hint was too pointed to be ignored.

Count Roulette took the proffered hand and for an instant his dark eyes looked straight into hers.

"*Au revoir*, Lady Vanda Delafer," he said slowly. "My stay in Monte Carlo is likely to be a short one, but something—call it my prophetic instinct, if you like—tells me that we shall meet again."

With a little bow and a parting glance through his eyeglass, he took his departure. For nearly a minute Lady Vanda stood motionless, staring at the closed door with eyes which had of a sudden become filled with dread; then, with a low sob, she sank into her chair.

"Who is that man?—what is he?" she asked in a hoarse whisper. "I loathe him, yet I fear him even more. And when he looked at me through that eyeglass I felt as if all the secrets of my innermost soul were lying bare before him. I believe he is the devil himself!"

"In that case you should find him highly congenial company," Bobby answered with a grin. "But as a matter of fact I suppose the fellow is nothing more than one of the usual crowd of dubious foreign 'counts' that one meets in a place like this. He has gained a sort of cheap notoriety by a few fortunate runs at the tables; but wait till his luck changes—as it must do sooner or later—and you'll see him vanish—like that!"

And the Honorable Bobby blew a cloud of cigarette smoke into the air.

WHEN, some two hours later, Frank called at the hotel he found Vanda attired in an artist's overall and apparently in the act of cleaning her palette.

"What, at work so early?" he cried in surprize. "You positively put me to shame—I haven't touched a brush for nearly a week. Let's have a look at the picture."

Vanda lifted her shoulders in a shrug of affected indifference.

"Oh, it's nothing much—just a sketch I dashed off a few days ago. I really did not intend you to see it, for I just dread having my poor amateur efforts criticized. Please let me hide it away in merciful oblivion." And she made a movement as if she were about to cover it up.

Greatly to her disappointment, he made no effort to prevent her. "As you please, Vanda," was all he said. "I have no wish to pry into matters that you would rather I did not."

She turned her eyes on him with a look of laughing dismay.

"Really, my dear Frank, that remark sounded frightfully mysterious—any one would imagine that I had all sorts of grisly skeletons in my cupboards! I suppose I must show it to you now, if only to convince you that there's nothing sinister about my poor daub. If you promise you won't be too scathing in your comments, I'll let you have one little peep. There!" She placed the sketch that Mary Deane had sold her on the easel so that the light fell upon it to the best effect. "As Shakespeare says somewhere or other, 'A poor thing, but mine own'!"

With a tolerant smile Frank turned to look, but as his eyes fell upon the picture his expression changed to a look of delighted wonder.

"By Jove, Vanda, this is simply wonderful!" he cried in a tone of genuine admiration. "I had no idea that you could turn out such clever and distinctive work."

Vanda raised her brows with an expression of artless surprize.

"Then you don't think it so very bad, Frank?"

"Bad?" he cried, catching her hands in his strong grasp and drawing her to him. "I only wish that I could paint half as well! Have you any more sketches that

you have 'dashed off,' as you so modestly call it?"

"Oh, I've kept a few," she answered carelessly, and without a tremor or a blush she took out the other three sketches of Mary Deane's and laid them before him. "It's a wonder that I did not destroy these, as I have the rest of my work. I had no idea that they were really good."

"Why, you dear little unassuming genius, every one of them is a masterpiece!" Frank exclaimed with a boyish laugh. "After we are married I must get you to give me some lessons——"

"Married? Oh, Frank, do you really mean that?" Without waiting for an answer, she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately. "You have made me the happiest girl in all the world!"

For a moment he stared at her stupidly. The words had been spoken unconsciously, his thoughts more on the glorious colorings of the pictured scenes than on Vanda herself. He would have recalled them had it been possible, but as it was there was only one thing that he could do.

"Of course I meant it, Vanda," he said gently, yet in a voice that he knew was strangely lacking in warmth. "I have always liked you, but now that there is another bond between us, your wonderful art——"

With a little playful laugh she put her hand on his mouth.

"For today let's forget all about those old pictures," she begged. "I shall get quite jealous of them if you persist in singing their praises, and if I once get the idea that you think more of them than you do of me, I declare I shall never paint another one again! Tell me that you love me for myself."

Smiling down at the blue eyes which looked into his so appealingly, Frank gave her the assurance she asked for. Yet, even as he spoke the words, his eyes wandered from the throbbing form he held in his arms to the glowing colors of the picture on the easel, and in his secret heart he knew that he lied. And Lady Vanda, flushed with triumph though she was, felt a pang of bitter resentment as she realized that the real inspirer of Frank's love was the genius of Mary Deane, the girl whose pictures she had claimed as her own.

It must be admitted that Frank and Lady Vanda looked a handsome and well-matched couple as they passed through the hotel foyer and into the sunny street, and their smiling, and apparently happy faces drew many an envious glance from the wrinkled dowagers and flabby, bilious-looking old gentlemen who seemed to make up the greater part of the residents.

The moment they reached the sidewalk Frank was aware of a familiar figure hurrying across the square toward them.

"I want to introduce you to a new friend, Vanda," he said. "He is a strange man, and I met him under strange circumstances, and I can not help thinking that, in some way or other, he is going to have a great influence in my life."

Vanda's eyes grew hard as she recognized the object of his words.

"You mean Count Roulette? If so, then your introduction comes somewhat late. The Count and I have met before."

Before Frank could voice his surprize at this unexpected piece of information, the Count was by their side.

"Well met, *mes amis!*" he cried, raising his broad-brimmed hat with a gesture which might have seemed exaggerated had it been less graceful. "I seemed to have a premonition that I should encounter you as you came out either to enjoy a walk in the morning air, or to woo the fickle goddess of chance."

Lady Vanda's fair eyebrows were lifted in genuine surprize as she turned to the Count. "Surely you must be aware that the Casino is not open so early in the day?"

"Truly, *mademoiselle*. But there are other ways of gambling at Monte, besides roulette or trente-et-quarante."

He pointed to the farther side of the square, where an old man was walking up and down displaying a large printed placard and at the same time calling out, *"Loterie! Loterie!"* Every now and then one of the passers-by would approach him, tender a coin, and receive in exchange a pink ticket torn from the book he held in his hand.

"The State Lottery is the only form of gambling in which the native Monégasques are allowed to indulge, for the authorities very wisely exclude their own citizens from the gaming-rooms," Count Roulette explained, his eyeglass focused on the old ticket-seller; then he added with a smile: "Now is your opportunity to make a little speculation. Although he does not know it, that shabby old man is at the present moment holding in his hand the ticket which will win 200,000 francs when the result of the draw is made public today. The winning check is number L7F. 49368, and it is the fourth ticket in the book he is holding in his hand."

A smile of amused contempt came over Vanda's features as she listened.

"Surely you do not expect me to believe that you can tell the winning number beforehand?" she cried.

"Oh, no, *mademoiselle*. I do not in the least expect you to believe such an apparent absurdity." The Count's tone was gently apologetic. "Yet it is a fact nevertheless. If you would like to be the richer by 200,000 francs before tonight, I would advise you to buy the check numbered L7F. 49368 before it is sold to some one else. It is now the third ticket from the top, for he has sold one since I last spoke."

"You must be joking, Count," she cried. "Such a thing is unheard of."

Count Roulette shrugged slightly.

"Alas, *mademoiselle*, it is only the unheard-of things which excite our interest in the present age of scientific marvels." He turned his head and threw a lightning glance at Lady Vanda's chauffeur, who was listening eagerly to the conversation. "But you will have to hurry if you wish to secure the winning ticket. It is now the second in the old man's book."

"I've a good mind to take your tip," Frank cried. "It's a chance, anyway."

"Alas, my dear friend, it is a chance which you have lost!" said the Count, shaking his head and pointing to the chauffeur who was hurrying across the road in the direction of the ticket-seller. "See, the enterprising Jules has forestalled you. He has already bought the ticket that will win what to him will mean a fortune."

"Lucky Jules!" Vanda laughed mockingly.

There was a strange expression on the Count's face as he raised his eyeglass and through it watched the chauffeur as he climbed into the driving-seat of Lady Vanda's high-powered car.

"Lucky?" he repeated softly. "Lucky . . . we shall see!"

For a while they chatted on different subjects, until Vanda glanced at the tiny watch she wore on her wrist and uttered an exclamation of surprize.

"I hope you won't think me a flatterer when I say that time passes very quickly in your company, Count," she cried gayly. "We must really be going now, as we have arranged to have a run to Nice by way of the Corniche Road. I have never

been by car before, and they say the scenery is wonderful."

"Nice?" There was a far-away expression in the old man's dark eyes as he repeated the word. "I am rather interested in that town, not because of its fashionable hotels and expensive shops, but because it was one of the places where my ancestors, the ancient Greeks, overcame the aboriginal inhabitants and built their Acropolis on the great rock which overhangs the little cove of *les Ponchettes*, and in it set up a great statue of Nike, the winged Goddess of Victory. It is from that almost forgotten goddess, Nike, that the modern name of the town, Nice, is derived."

"Indeed?" she murmured politely, suppressing a yawn with difficulty. "You must be frightfully clever to know all about such dead-and-done-with events."

Count Roulette shook his head and almost unconsciously his fingers strayed to the eyeglass which dangled from its gold chain.

" 'Dead-and-done-with' is a very apt description, my dear Lady Vanda," he replied quietly. "Yet who shall say how little or how much we moderns owe to the sages and philosophers of the ancient civilizations which have preceded us into the Eternal Night?" He broke off abruptly with a little laugh of apology. "But I fear I shall get the name of a bad companion if I indulge in such speculations on such a delightful morning as this—one should keep gloomy thoughts for gloomy weather, and tell ghost tales only when the snow is on the ground and the wind moans in the chimney, as is your English custom. I do not think I could do better than follow your example and take a run in my car along the Corniche Road as far as Nice."

Disregarding Vanda's warning frown, Frank turned as he was about to enter the car.

"Why not accompany us, Count? There's plenty of room and I should welcome your company."

For a second it seemed as if Count Roulette was on the point of accepting; but, after raising his glass to his eye and glancing at the chauffeur he shook his head.

"I would prefer to use my own car for the journey there and back. However, I trust you will do me the honor of lunching with me at the Negresco at Nice. You will? Good! Then *au revoir* till we meet there. I will phone the *maître d'hôtel* to reserve a private room, for I may possibly have something to tell you of a rather confidential nature."

With a sweep of his broad-brimmed hat, Count Roulette turned away and hurried off in the direction of the quay. Frank's eyes followed the tall figure until it was lost to sight amid the fashionably dressed crowd. Then, vaguely uneasy, he turned to the waiting Jules and motioned to him to start the car on its journey along the Corniche Road.

ALTHOUGH visitors to the Riviera are accustomed to speak of "the Corniche Road," there are, strictly speaking, no less than three highways that come under that general designation. There is the Grande Corniche, the great road hewn out of the rugged face of the mountains as part of the first Napoleon's ambitious plan for the conquest of Italy; there is the Moyenne or Middle Corniche, a newly constructed road which follows the general trend of the former, though at a lower altitude; and lastly there is the Petite Corniche, sometimes called the Corniche du Littoral, which, as its name implies, follows the coastline more or less

closely and is the nearest route between Monte Carlo and Nice.

Jules, having a good car beneath him and a clear road in front, set off at a speed which would have covered the whole distance in some twenty minutes or so. But Frank soon pulled him up.

"I don't mind a bit of fast travelling occasionally," he said to Vanda by way of explanation, "but it seems like sacrilege to rush through such beautiful scenery with the speed of an express train. Just look at the wonderful shades of blue in that sea—sapphire, turquoise, with here and there a shimmer of that fleeting sheen that one sees on the breast of a peacock. Well has this coast been named the Côte d'Azur!"

Vanda turned languidly in her seat and allowed her eyes to travel over the expanse of sun-kissed waters.

"Oh yes, it's very pretty," she said, anxious to show her appreciation. "The colors are exquisite—that stretch of sea between that rock and the beach reminds me of a perfect dream of a dress I bought as I came through Paris—it was exactly that shade."

"Doesn't it remind you of anything else?"

Struck by his tone, she turned and saw that he was regarding her with a puzzled frown. Rousing herself, she looked at the scene before her with a new interest, and her heart gave a quick nervous throb as she realized how narrowly she had escaped a bad blunder.

"Why of course, it's the place I chose for the sketch I showed you this morning," she cried. "Really, it was stupid of me not to recognize it before. But my eyes were dazzled by the sun, and I have a splitting headache. Do please tell Jules to stop at the first place which looks as if it could provide a decent cup of tea."

A few minutes later they halted in the villa-lined boulevard of Cap-d'Ail, before an establishment which proudly announced its ability to supply every want of the English or American visitor, and while Vanda was drinking her tea Frank strolled out and gazed over the low stone wall to where the distant promontory of Cap Ferret hung like a faint blue cloud midway between sea and sky.

For several minutes he remained in silent contemplation of the scene before him; then, with something that sounded like a sigh, he turned to make his way back to the car. As he swung round he noticed for the first time a girl who was seated before a small sketching-easel on a stretch of grass overlooking the scene he had just been admiring.

Mary Deane had felt a very natural elation when she had quitted Lady Vanda Delafer at the Hotel de Paris that morning. Her art meant something more to her than just a pleasant mode of passing the time in the open air; it was her livelihood, and to have sold four pictures in one morning was an event as rare as it was welcome. She had received no money, it is true; but it never occurred to Mary to doubt her somewhat haughty patron when she had promised to let her have a check the following morning. Had she known the real character of that lady, and the deception in which her own pictures were to play a prominent part, Mary's steps might have been less buoyant and her mind less at ease than was actually the case when she had sallied forth—after an early and somewhat more sumptuous lunch in honor of the occasion—to begin another picture. It was while she was engaged in "roughing in" the outline that Frank Hartley caught sight of her.

At first his interest was awakened by the girl's occupation rather than by the girl herself. All unconscious of his pres-

ence, she was seated with her face half turned away from him, her eyes fixed alternately on the canvas before her and the distant view. All he could see was the outline of her face against the shadowy green of the foliage behind, yet the dimly seen profile was one which represented in living flesh and blood his own mental conception of ideal beauty.

But he was conscious of something more than mere prettiness in her face; character and determination showed in the line of her dark eyebrows and in her firm, red-lipped mouth and resolute chin; while the steady eyes of blue-gray were singularly intelligent as well as beautiful. Dark though her hair was, something told him that the girl was neither French nor Italian. Was she English? or American——

"Frank! Frank! Where have you disappeared to?"

The voice of Vanda, harsh with impatience, broke in upon his thoughts. With one lingering glance at the unknown girl at the easel, Frank stepped out into the road and waved his hand.

"Oh, there you are! I was beginning to think you intended remaining in this place all day. I finished my tea ages ago, and I've been looking for you everywhere——"

Frank looked at Vanda curiously as her voice came to an abrupt stop. Her eyes, wide open and filled with an expression which looked more like fear than surprize, were looking past him at the girl seated at the easel, who now had risen to her feet and was regarding Vanda with what looked like a smile of recognition.

"Why — do you know her?" Frank cried in eager surprize.

"No—yes—that is, slightly." Vanda, with the merest suspicion of a nod to Mary Deane, grasped Frank's arm and almost dragged him to the car. "Let us be moving on."

She sprang into the car and held the door open. Frank hesitated, his foot on the step.

"But who is that girl? She seemed to know you."

Lady Vanda's quick wits had already concocted an explanation.

"Oh, *her?*" she drawled carelessly. "She's some poor creature who called at the hotel the other day hawking some wretched daubs which she said she'd painted. I really couldn't help feeling sorry for her, for she told a pitiful story of having been lured to Monte Carlo by an adventurer who had deceived her by promising marriage. Of course, one meets all kinds of such people in a place like this, and I am not narrow-minded, thank heaven! I gave the girl a few guineas out of pure charity, and I suppose the poor creature is grateful. Please don't humiliate her by questioning her further. The best thing we can do is to get along to Nice."

Jules let in the clutch and the great car began to glide smoothly along the road which stretched like a twisted ribbon of white between the blue of the sea and the warm gray of the mountains. Turning, Frank caught a glimpse of the girl still standing by her easel. When a turn of the road hid her from sight, he settled himself in his seat and lit a cigarette with a thoughtful and slightly puzzled air.

Somehow the girl with the blue-gray eyes and Lady Vanda's description of her did not seem to fit.

"WHAT's all the excitement about, Jules?"

Their car had crossed the Pont Garibaldi at Nice, and had entered the Place Massena, when the sight of a large and

excited crowd gathered before the Hôtel de Ville brought forth Frank's inquiry.

"They are waiting to hear the result of the Public Lottery, *m'sieu*—the same that I bought a ticket for before we left Monte Carlo."

Frank smiled slightly as he remembered how the nimble-witted Frenchman had forestalled him in the purchase of the lottery ticket recommended by Count Roulette.

"Well, you deserve to be fortunate—if only for your pluck!" he said half jestingly. "Say, what would you do if your ticket carried off the first prize?"

"I would make good use of the money, *m'sieu*," the man replied with an earnestness that was almost pathetic. "I have my eye on a little garage business that is going cheap—cheap, *m'sieu* will understand, for a man with 200,000 francs in his pocket. There I would make much money, and there is a girl . . . at Narbonne . . . we have waited so long, *m'sieu*, for we are both poor; and when *Monsieur le Comte* spoke of the winning ticket I seemed to see a way——"

"I understand." Frank's tone was free from jesting now. "You run us round to the Negresco, garage the car, and then skim off to see if you've been lucky. And I hope you have—for the sake of the girl at Narbonne."

"I thank *m'sieu* for his good wishes."

The car turned into the Promenade des Anglais and a few minutes later came to a halt opposite the great hotel where Count Roulette had promised to meet them. Jules immediately disappeared with the car in the direction of the hotel garage, and Frank and Lady Vanda made their way through the vestibule and inquired for the room which had been reserved for them.

It was quickly evident that Count Roulette's was a name to conjure with in the Hotel Negresco. It was the height of the winter season, when the hotel is at its busiest, yet the room which was placed at their disposal was one of the much-coveted apartments with a southerly aspect, with large windows overlooking the limpid blue waters of the Baie des Anges. It was with an ever-increasing wonder that Lady Vanda saw the deference which the mere mention of his name inspired.

"Who *is* this mysterious Count?" she asked Frank as they sat on the shaded balcony awaiting his arrival. "Is he a prophet—a seer? Or is he merely a little wrong in his head?"

Frank could only shrug helplessly.

"I really know no more about him than you do, Vanda."

The girl frowned at what she imagined was an evasive answer.

"Is he a madman?" she demanded bluntly.

"There is method in his madness, then," Frank laughed, "and I know I'd sooner trust his judgment than that of the sanest man living. He may be a little strange and eccentric, Vanda, but you can take my word for it that he's far from mad."

For a few minutes there was silence, the girl gazing out to sea with eyes that were half veiled in thought.

"Have you noticed that queer eyeglass that he carries on a gold chain?" she asked suddenly. "Have you noticed his trick of looking at people through it, almost as if he were examining their secret souls? I thought he was short-sighted at first, but I watched him and found that he could see things near to him and far off without using it. I suppose that is part of the poor man's eccentricity?"

"Maybe." Frank's tone was curt, for Vanda's question was but a thinly veiled sneer. "Perhaps he can see more than we

suspect with that antique-looking glass of his."

Lady Vanda Delafer threw back her head and gave a peal of mocking laughter.

"Perhaps he saw the winning number of the lottery in which poor Jules, with a faith that would be touching if it were not laughable, invested his money this morning?"

"He may have seen even that!" Frank Hartley crossed to the bell and a moment later one of the waiters entered the room. "Do you know the number of the winning ticket in the National Lottery?" he asked the man.

"*Mais oui, monsieur.* I myself have speculated, but without success, *hélas!* The winning number was L7F. 49368."

Vanda sat back in her chair with a gasp.

"It is the very number that the Count told you to buy!" she cried, her eyes wide open with something more than surprize. "Jules has won a fortune!"

"Well, he deserves his luck, for he had more faith in the Count than we had," cried Frank. "And I must say I'm glad, both for his sake and the sake of the girl at Narbonne——"

"AND I, *monsieur,* am deeply sorry!" said a voice which caused them both to look round with a start.

Count Roulette had entered the room at the heels of the waiter and was regarding them with an expression of sadness on his pale handsome face. He came slowly forward, dismissed the waiter with a nod, then raised his eyeglass and looked fixedly at the newly engaged pair.

"Doubtless it seems strange to you that I should express sorrow at the news of your chauffeur's good fortune," said the Count. "But I have a presentiment that sorrow and tragedy will follow. Will you think it presumptuous of me if I beg of you not to return to Monte Carlo in your car?"

"But—but why not?" Frank stammered in bewilderment. "We were looking forward to the run back by moonlight."

The Count shrugged.

"There is an excellent train service, or my own car is at your disposal. But on no account travel by the one driven by Jules."

At the cool audacity of what she considered his attempt to dictate to her, a wave of anger came over Lady Vanda.

"You speak in riddles, Count," she cried. "You have made one or two pretty shrewd guesses, but that does not give you the right to rule us like a pair of babies! Why shouldn't we go back by my car? Jules is a careful driver, and I shall feel quite safe in his charge."

Count Roulette made a little gesture of smiling dissent, but his voice was grave as he replied.

"Tonight, *mademoiselle,* he will be neither steady nor safe. He has already celebrated his good fortune in more than one café, and he is a man who carries his liquor well—up to a certain point. But the Corniche is a dangerous road to take chances on. There will be a bad accident at the sharp bend above Cap Roux, and the car will swerve over the cliff onto the rocks below. Jules will be killed instantly. I wish to save you and Monsieur Hartley from a similar fate."

For one moment the steady eyes and slow, measured utterance had their effect; then the bantering voice of Vanda broke the tension.

"A thousand thanks for your warning, my dear Count, but I am not nervous," she drawled. "If you feel jumpy about a little moonlight spin you are at perfect liberty to return by rail. As for me, the arrangements stand."

Count Roulette turned to Frank.

"And you?" he queried.

"Frank will be guided by me," Vanda interposed swiftly. "Please say no more on the subject. The matter is settled."

With a silent shrug Count Roulette rang the bell and ordered dinner to be served. He proved to be an excellent host and during the progress of the meal did not revert to the topic of the homeward journey. It was only when he was bidding the pair good-bye in front of the hotel that he spoke what was in his mind.

"You are determined to disregard my warning, then?" His voice was almost wistful as he put the question.

Lady Vanda laughed openly as she took her seat in the car.

"As you are so solicitous about our safety, my dear Count, why not come with us to look after us?" she scoffed. "The car will easily hold another passenger."

Count Roulette raised his eyeglass and surveyed the vehicle as though to verify her words. Then he came closer and sank his voice to an impressive whisper which she alone could hear.

"There *is* another passenger—although you see him not—a personage whom the mediæval artists usually represented riding on a pale horse, with an hour-glass slung round his bony hips, and a whetted scythe grasped in his skeleton hands. The Shadow of Death is your fellow-traveller, Lady Vanda!"

"Won't you introduce him?" laughed the girl. "I should imagine that his company would be a trifle more cheerful than yours."

She nodded to Jules and the car began to move. Count Roulette raised his hat with a slow, sweeping gesture.

"He will need no introduction from me, *mademoiselle,*" he said gravely, *"—when you get to Cap Roux!"*

The big car in which Lady Vanda and Frank Hartley were being driven back to Monte Carlo was the last word in luxury and speed. Within a few minutes of leaving the hotel it had purred its smooth way along the palm-shaded Promenade des Anglais, skirted the ornamental gardens which face the Casino Municipal, and begun to thread the narrower streets which lead to the eastern outlet to the town, mounting the steadily rising gradient to the Corniche Road with the effortless ease of a swallow on the wing.

Mindful of the Count's grim prediction, Frank watched the chauffeur's manner of taking the corners and avoiding the oncoming traffic; but Jules seemed, if anything, more careful than usual. It was not until they were abreast of the tree-crowned hill of Montboron that he leant back in his seat, convinced that the wine which Jules had taken to celebrate his accession to wealth had not affected his eyesight or his judgment. It was true that Count Roulette had made some lucky guesses in the past, but he had evidently made a big blunder in stating that there would be a crash that night. It was curious, though, how he had contrived to foretell the number of the winning lottery ticket. Could it be by some manner of thought-reading that he made such confident statements? Or was it mere chance that he had happened to be right? But tonight he had made his first mistake. There would be no fatal accident; he would reach Monte Carlo safely and in the morning would call on the Count and chaff him unmercifully on the danger of being too explicit in his predictions.

With a smile at his foolishness in taking the man's pretensions so seriously, Frank dismissed the subject from his mind and gave himself up to enjoying the beauty of the night.

The three Corniche Roads which lead eastward from Nice have been well named; each is actually a mere "corniche" or ledge hewn for the greater part of its length from the sheer face of the cliff, a ribbon coiled and draped between the mighty ramparts of the mountain hinterland and the tideless sea. The road they were now traversing had appeared beautiful enough when seen basking in the dazzling sunshine, with sky, sea, and the flower-decked gardens combining in a riot of color. Now, as Frank lay back in his cushioned seat, watching the procession of dark pines and palms silhouetted against the starry sky, breathing the warm air scented with wisteria and golden mimosa, he felt as though he were being borne by some fabled genii through an enchanted land. Every unexpected twist of the mazy track brought its fresh angle of vision. At one moment the bonnet of the car would be pointing straight inland to where the purple-blue heights rose, star-crowned and mysterious; a sudden bend, and they would be looking over the smooth moonlit waters, with nothing but a light railing or a crumbling, moss-grown wall between them and the sheer verge of the cliffs.

"You seem very silent tonight, Frank. Has our cheerful friend, the Count, rubbed the fear of death into you with his crazy prophecies?"

There was a note of sarcasm in the slowly drawled query that brought him to earth with a sudden jar.

"My thoughts were far away from Count Roulette and his prophecies," he answered.

"Then what *were* you thinking of? Come, dear," she moved closer to him and slipped her arm coaxingly through his. "There should be no secrets between engaged couples, you know. Will a penny buy your thoughts, or shall I have to bid higher?"

Her smiling lips were temptingly close to his as she leaned forward; but he was almost unconscious of them as he turned his head and again looked out into the night.

"Just at that moment I fear my thoughts were not worth even a penny," he answered carelessly. "I was merely admiring the scenery and thinking what wonderful pictures might be painted of some of the spots we have passed. I'm rather surprized that the same thought did not occur to you, Vanda—with such scenes to inspire you, you might even excel that wonderful sketch you showed me this morning."

"Yes, yes—of course," she hastened to say, turning her head aside to hide the frown that had gathered on her forehead. His words had recalled the memory of her debt to the pretty young artist, and her own non-existent bank balance. How she wished that she had taken the advice of the eccentric Count Roulette and risked a few francs on the lottery ticket he had so confidently asserted would win the prize. Mad or sane, his luck was amazing; his guesses of the trend of future events had been verified in a manner that was almost uncanny. But no man could always be right, and it seemed self-evident that he had overreached himself when he had predicted disaster that night.

"What place is that?" she asked as they came through a cluster of white villas on a bold promontory overlooking the sea.

"Beaulieu." He glanced at her with a slight smile as he added: "The point you can see about a mile farther on is Cap Roux. Unless Count Roulette is a lying prophet, it is there we shall meet our fate! So, if you wish to circumvent the decrees of destiny you had better get out and walk."

"How absurd!" her laugh rang out in amused contempt. "I wonder that you have the patience to listen to such nonsense. Nobody but a madman would claim to see the future as he does."

"Quite so, my dear, but all the same——" He reached up and took the speaking-tube from its clip. "Jules!" he called through to the chauffeur, "Please be careful as you take that sharp turn above Cap Roux—just before you come to the railway bridge, you know."

"Trust me for that, *m'sieu,*" came back the confident reply. "One does not want to break one's neck just after having won a fortune!"

The car was now skirting the wide sweep of the Bay of Beaulieu, past the fantastic masses of tumbled rocks and jagged cliffs which have received the fanciful name of "Petite-Afrique." Here the broken nature of the ground has compelled the road to run through a series of short tunnels beneath the towering bluffs which intersect its path. Jules slowed down to a mere crawl as they entered the last tunnel, which pierces the Cap itself, and it was only when they emerged into the moonlight on the farther side that he stepped on the accelerator and the car leapt forward like a hound unleashed.

A derisive laugh came from Lady Vanda's lips.

"We're through without mishap!" she cried. "Your wonderful prophet is a charlatan—a trickster—a cheap liar! . . . Ah, God help us! . . ."

Her mocking voice ended in a scream of mortal terror as a pair of glaring headlights sprang into view round the bend a few yards ahead. It was a high-powered English car, traveling at speed, on the left—the wrong according to Continental usage—side of the road.

Jules had a bare two seconds in which to act, yet he might have avoided a collision had his brain been unclouded by the fumes of wine. A slight turn of the steering-wheel, and he could have passed on the other side with twice the width of the car to spare. As it was, he jammed on the brakes, and the car skidded to the right, crashed its way through the light iron railing and remained poised precariously on the very verge of the abyss below.

But only for an instant. There was a rending crash as the oncoming car struck the rear of the chassis, sending it nearer the edge. Frank felt the floor beneath his feet take a steeper angle as the bonnet began to dip; streams of loosened clods and fragments of stone began to clatter down the cliff.

"Jump!" he shouted to Vanda. "Jump for your life!"

But the girl was crouching back in her seat, her hands pressed over her eyes, too terrified to move. Quick as thought, Frank stepped to her side. His left arm seemed strangely limp and useless, but with his right he strove to lift her from the seat. With the unreasoning panic of semi-consciousness she clung to the side of the car, resisting his efforts to save her.

"Let go!" he cried, striving to break her hold with his one serviceable hand. "It's death to stop here!"

Even as he spoke, the car gave another lurch forward. There came a sound of tearing and rending of metal as the last remnant of the shattered railings gave way beneath the weight thrown upon them. Just in time Frank leapt upward, his right hand stretched to grasp the branch of a tree which showed black against the sky a few feet above his head. And as he sprang the doomed car slid from beneath him, plunging, accompanied by an avalanche of stones, over the edge and falling with a dull splash into the sea far below.

It seemed ages that he hung there before willing arms grasped him by the legs

and lowered him to the ground. Faint and reeling, sick with horror and the pain of an arm which he now realized was broken, he staggered to the road as a large covered car appeared from the direction of Nice and came to a standstill. A moment later he was looking into the face of Count Roulette.

"So, the accident has happened?" the voice of the mysterious Greek was as unconcerned as if he were making a remark on the weather. "It seems as if my wild prophecy was not very wide of the truth."

Frank Hartley took an unsteady pace forward and looked the old man full in the eyes.

"Who are you?" he demanded hoarsely. "Are you angel of light or fiend from hell that you are able to see the fates of men and read their hearts like the pages of a book? Seer—magician—angel—devil? Which are you? Speak!"

A faint smile broke the sphinx-like immobility of Count Roulette's features as he shrugged slightly.

"None of these things am I, my young friend," he said, his somber eyes fixed on the other's face. "I am merely a man like yourself—*but I am a man who sees the truth!*"

For an instant Frank stared stupidly, trying to grasp his meaning. Then came the inevitable reaction of the shock and numbing pain. He opened his lips to speak, but before the words came he swayed unsteadily and fell in a dead faint at the feet of the man with the strange-looking eyeglass.

DREAMS, vivid and swift-moving, yet vague and confused as a fogged cinema film, preceded Frank Hartley's return to consciousness. Once more he fought the two apaches in the gardens of the Casino; once more he saw the graceful figure of the unknown girl seated at her easel against a background of sea and sky; then came the repetition of the Count's solemn warning; the night ride through the scented air; the impact of the colliding cars and the vision of Lady Vanda's terror-frozen features as she fell. When at length his delirium passed and he looked sanely on his surroundings it was only with difficulty that he persuaded himself that what he saw was not another phase of his visions.

He was lying in bed in a prettily decorated room overlooking the sea. The furniture and decorations, though plain and inexpensive, evidenced a perfection of taste with which he could find no fault. The tempered sunshine, entering through drawn window curtains of gay-colored chintz, showed trifles and knickknacks subtly indicative of a woman's presence; an easel beating an unfinished sketch in oils hinted that the owner of this haven of harmony and repose possessed at least one taste in common with him.

Turning his eyes again toward the window, he noticed that a girl was bending over a small table set there, arranging some flowers in a china bowl. Something familiar about that slender, shadowy outline caused him to catch his breath in a low gasp of surprize. He blinked his eyes and looked again, dreading that she would fade away like the other phantoms of his dreams. But she was still there—and she was, in very truth, the girl whom he had seen painting on the cliffs on that afternoon that now seemed so long past.

"Ah, you are evidently beginning to take an interest in your surroundings," said a cheery, well-remembered voice from the other side of the bed.

Frank essayed to turn, and for the first time discovered that his left arm was encased in splints and surgical bandages, and strapped immovably across his chest.

"No, no, don't move," Count Roulette

went on hastily, moving round the bed so that he came within Frank's range of vision. "You have been through a bad time, what with the shock and the fracture. But you are on the mend now, and in a few days you may be about again."

"But the others — Jules and Lady Vanda? Were they killed?"

There was a grave expression on the old man's face as he inclined his head in assent.

"No human efforts could have saved them. It is a sheer drop of eighty feet into deep water . . . the bodies were not recovered until two days later."

"Two days!" Frank gasped. "Then how long have I been lying here?"

"A week," came the answer, and as he spoke the Count beckoned to the girl at the window. "And you have to thank this young lady for her clever nursing during your crisis. Allow me to introduce you to Miss Mary Deane."

Frank felt a strange thrill as her cool hand touched his own for an instant.

"How can I thank you for your kindness?" he said in a voice full of genuine emotion. "I was a stranger to you, yet you gave me shelter—nursed me——"

She held her hand up in protest.

"What else could I have done?" she said. "My bungalow was the nearest to the scene of the accident—or almost the nearest—and you were much too ill to be carried farther. How could I turn you from my door when Count Roulette solemnly declared that the delay in getting you to the hospital would mean the difference between life and death? Besides, you were not quite a stranger, since the Count vouched for you—and he seems to be an excellent judge of character."

A smile spread over Frank's pale face.

"He does indeed," he agreed heartily, "seeing that he has chosen you for my guardian angel."

The whole-hearted fervor with which the words were spoken caused a deeper tint to creep into the girl's cheeks.

"I can see that you are getting light-headed, Mr. Hartley," she said in a tone of severe reproof as she poured out a dose of medicine and held it to his lips. "Come, drink this. Then go to sleep until you can talk rationally."

There was a gleam of amusement in Count Roulette's eyes as he raised his eyeglass and looked at each in turn.

"I venture to predict a speedy recovery for our patient," he said with a smile as he quitted the room. "Mr. Frank Hartley may consider himself very fortunate to be here—in more ways than one," he added under his breath as the door closed behind him.

"YOU are a strange man, Count, and you possess a positively uncanny power of guessing the trend of future events." It was three days later, when Frank and Count Roulette were seated on the balcony of the bungalow, that the younger man made the remark. "And I must confess that I envy you your strange gift."

"Are you sure you mean that?" The old man's eyes were fixed on Frank with a keen penetrating gaze as he asked the question. "Is it enviable, think you, to walk the crowded streets of a great city, conscious of the greed, hatred, jealousy, and dishonesty which eat like loathsome cankers in the hearts of those around me? To see, beneath the smug, respectable faces of the business men, or the beautiful faces of the women, hidden thoughts which make one turn to the dumb animals for relief? To have every ideal—every pleasing illusion shattered for ever? No, no, envy me not my strange power, but rather go down on your knees in thankfulness that you have been spared the pos-

session of such a dangerous, saddening gift."

Frank Hartley was bewildered at the intense emotion which vibrated in the old man's voice.

"You almost speak as if this power had been forced on you against your will," he observed with a slight smile.

"In one sense it *has* been forced on me. Nothing was farther from my thoughts when I discovered the Eye of Veritas."

"Veritas?" Frank repeated the word slowly, a puzzled frown creasing his forehead. "That has something to do with truth, has it not?"

Count Roulette gave an affirmative nod.

"It is the name of one of the deities of Ancient Greece—the Goddess of Truth. She was not very famous or well known, I must admit, and you will find but few references to her in the classical writers; for the Greeks of old apparently had as slight a veneration for the virtue she symbolized as have the people of the present day. But she had her temples and her mysteries, and one lonely mountain shrine in Bœotia was considered especially sacred, and thither flocked crowds of pilgrims, all eager to know the truth and—for the time being—to revere so rare a virtue. It was in the ruins of that Temple of Veritas that I became the most favored, the most cursed, the most disillusioned of mortals—a man who saw the Truth!"

A low, long-drawn sigh escaped the lips of Count Roulette, and for a while he sat silent, his dark eyes fixed on the distant horizon with an expression of wistful yearning, as though he were regretting something lost to him for ever. Presently he roused himself and continued:

"At the time it happened, some forty years ago, I was a young man fresh from college; but, young as I was, I had made a special study of the classical lore of my country, which resulted in my obtaining a permanent post in the Excavations Department of the Hellenic Archeological Society. For some time our headquarters at Athens had been receiving vague rumors of hoards of statues, coins, and relics being unearthed by the peasants on the site of the ancient city of Tanagra, which is quite close to the modern village of Skimatari. I was deputed to go to the district to see if I could find out if there was any truth in the rumors; in order to allay suspicion I went alone, in the character of a man who travels for pleasure.

"I soon found that my task was not likely to be either easy or pleasant. In ancient times Bœotia had a most unenviable reputation, and the cultured Athenians were never tired of contemptuously referring to the inhabitants as stupid, awkward, uncivilized and ignorant. They pointed out, with truth, that the country had contributed nothing to Greek literature, nor had it produced a great sculptor or painter of note—indeed, the very word Bœotian was at that period almost synonymous with imbecility. And I can affirm, from personal experience, that their present-day descendants have many of the traits of their departed ancestors. I have traveled much since that time, but never have I encountered a more degraded, dishonest, brutal and treacherous horde of scoundrels than the inhabitants of that wretched village near the site of the ancient Temple of Truth.

"There were only two men in Skimatari whom I felt I could trust; one was the village priest, a venerable old man with flowing silvery hair and a patriarchal beard, and the other was the landlord of the inn where I put up. This latter was the very personification of the traditional innkeeper of stage and story; fat, red-cheeked; with merry, twinkling eyes and a bluff, hearty manner that made me take to him at first sight. His name was Gior-

gios Dimitri, but he was usually called by his nickname of 'Barba-Jorghi', which means 'Old George'. As for the rest of the villagers, they seemed to suspect the reason of my presence and remained sullenly aloof. Needless to say, the moment I arrived the secret excavations that they had been making were filled in, and I could discover nothing.

"Well, I had hung about the village to no good results for a week or more, and I was seriously thinking of giving up my quest as a bad job and making my way back to Athens, when, late one night, after the last toper had staggered out of the inn, Barba-Jorghi sidled up to me with a proposition that sent my hopes soaring to the skies.

"Of course he did not come to the point directly. He began a long rambling diatribe about the scarcity of travelers, the poverty of his village customers, the high price of wine and the smallness of his profits. From that he went on to draw comparisons between the present wretchedness of the district and its former wealth, pointing his words, to my great amazement, by producing a well-thumbed copy of Müller's translation of Dicærchus, a classical author who wrote in the second century B. C. Thinking to draw him out by a little flattery, I complimented him on his archeological knowledge, and he snapped at the bait like a famished pike.

" 'You are right!' he cried. 'Although you see me here, the keeper of a poor inn, struggling to make a paltry *drachma* or two, I am not like the ignorant swine around me. No, no!—Old Jorghi can read; he can study; he can think; he can look up and see far afield while the other fools toil with their faces to the ground. Old Jorghi is wise, even as you are, my young friend. We are two wise men in a community of fools, and like wise men we should turn our wisdom to account.'

"Naturally, I asked him how, and he went on:

" 'This writer speaks of a famous oracle situated near here, which people came from all parts to consult. He says that this oracle, which was kept in a small temple in the mountains, predicted future events, laid bare the secret thoughts, illuminating the hidden souls of men like the noonday sun shining through a crystal goblet of wine. Not that you or I believe such fairy-tales,' he added with a knowing wink, 'but the all-important thing which concerns us is that the ancient pilgrims believed them, and showered their offering of gold, silver and precious stones into the coffers of the wily priests. There must be wealth untold lying in the ruins of that Temple of Veritas—enough to make us both millionaires!'

"His words and manner set my pulses racing with excitement, for it was clear that he was about to broach the very matter which had brought me from Athens. I managed to infuse a note of amused incredulity into my voice as I replied: 'But there's small chance of us ever finding it, worse luck!'

"The innkeeper leaned nearer to me across the table, his eyes glittering in the dim lamplight.

" 'I have already found it—I, Barba-Jorghi, the keeper of a village inn—I have found the site of the ancient Oracle of Truth!'

"For the first time a vague suspicion entered my mind.

" 'Then why do you confide in me?' I asked. 'Why don't you take the treasure and be rich?'

" 'I would if I could,' he answered with engaging frankness. 'But it will need the strength of two men to move the blocks of stone which seal the door of the treasure chamber. I dare not ask the aid of my neighbors—they would murder me

without the slightest hesitation for a hundredth part of the wealth which is inside. But you are a gentleman and honest. I can trust you to share with me fairly.'

"His childlike trust in me, no less than the magnificence of the offer itself, almost took my breath away.

" 'But I am an utter stranger to you——' I began to protest.

" 'All the better,' he interrupted quickly, with a smile which rather puzzled me at the time. 'Being a stranger, you can leave the district without raising comment. Tomorrow you must let it be known that you are tired of the place and intend returning to Athens. You will set off on horseback in full view of the villagers, and take the highroad which follows the coast, setting your pace so that you arrive at Oropus a little after dusk has fallen. A little beyond the town is a bridle path leading back across the mountains. Follow this, and you will come to a deserted post-house at the crossroads. I will be awaiting you there with the necessary tools and a spare mule to carry the treasure, which you will bear to some obscure retreat until I can settle up my affairs here, sell the inn for what it will fetch, and afterward join you. Do you think my plan is good?'

"I nodded silently, well pleased that he had played so blindly into my hands, and after we had gone over the details once more, we parted and retired for the night.

"EVERYTHING went off without a hitch. I reached the deserted post-house shortly after ten o'clock, tethered my horse in one of the roofless stables, and followed Barba-Jorghi along a narrow boulder-strewn track which led at a steep angle up the mountain. It was ticklish work in the darkness, for at places the path overhung the gorge below, and a single false step would have meant death. But Jorghi had made himself well acquainted with the track, and after about an hour of stiff climbing we emerged safely on to a little wooded plateau which jutted out like a broad spur from the mass of the mountain proper. Without hesitation he plunged into the dense undergrowth, forcing his way through, until he came to a halt facing what seemed to be a huge mound overgrown with tangled bushes. Here he lit the lantern he carried, and by its light he searched for a time along the edge of the mound. Presently he set the lantern down and pulled aside a heap of dead leaves and branches.

" 'Look!' he said, pointing downward.

"My heart leapt when I saw a portion of a wall of squared masonry, with the sculptured lintel of a door just showing above the surface of the ground. It did not need a second glance at the angular Greek characters engraved on the weather-worn stone to tell me that I stood on the threshold of the fabled Temple of Truth.

"In silence we set to work to dig down far enough to effect an entrance; but the door proved to be blocked by a wall of rough blocks of stone, which seemed to have been built in haste. As soon as we had cleared sufficient space in which to manipulate a pick and crowbar, we attacked this with a will. It was heavy work, but hope spurred us on, and at last, panting and streaming with perspiration, we squeezed our bodies through and stood within.

"The light of the lantern was dim, and it was only by slow degrees that we were able to examine our surroundings. As I made a slow circuit of the place I caught glimpses of sculptured friezes, fluted columns, Doric capitals, matchless statues still upright on their pedestals. Treasure or no treasure, I knew that we had made the discovery of a lifetime—an ancient Greek

temple as it was in the heyday of its splendor.

" 'We waste time!' cried Jorghi, impatiently snatching the lantern from me. 'The treasure, man, the treasure!'

"Beyond the small ring of lanternlight the darkness seemed to hem us in like a solid wall; the air was pervaded with a deathlike chill; the silence so intense that our restrained breathing sent vague echoes gliding before us like sighing ghosts as we made our way into the innermost sanctuary, where a huge statue of Truth, naked yet chaste, towered dimly above us. With a shout of joy, Barba-Jorghi darted forward and flung himself on a massive coffer of greenish bronze which stood in a recess behind the statue.

" 'It is here—the treasure!' he shouted. 'The treasure at last!'

"Seizing the crowbar, he thrust the point under the hasp which secured the lid, wrenching the corroded metal apart. With a creaking of disused hinges, the lid swung up, revealing a heap of yellowish-gray material. A cry of disappointment burst from my companion.

" 'Rags—nothing but old rags!' he groaned.

" 'Be silent!' I whispered fiercely, for my own nerves were on edge. 'Who knows what is underneath?'

"I thrust him aside and knelt before the chest, lifting out the garments one by one and laying them on the floor. They had the appearance of ceremonial robes worn by the priests, but they were so tender with age that the material came into shreds even as I lifted them. Right at the bottom of the coffer I came upon this——"

Count Roulette paused in his narrative and held up the eyeglass that was suspended from his neck. Frank Hartley looked surprized.

"But I thought the science of optics was quite unknown in those ancient days," he said.

The Count nodded in agrement.

"Quite so; but they were acquainted with something even more wonderful."

Struck by his peculiar tone, Frank bent forward and examined the object with closer interest. Apparently it had no magnifying power, for the surfaces were quite flat; it seemed to be nothing more than a thin segment of natural, colorless crystal, slightly oval in shape and set in a narrow band of gold, the handle being formed of the slender figure of a woman, probably intended to represent Veritas herself.

"There does not appear to be anything very wonderful about that glass," Frank declared at length.

"So I thought myself when I first discovered it," the old man continued. "Naturally my first act was to take it up and hold it to my eye to ascertain if it possessed any optical properties, and the most convenient object on which to focus it was the face of Barba-Jorghi as he stood watching me keenly. To my eye, however, the crystal seemed to have no more effect than a piece of common glass; but its effect on my brain, my understanding, was astounding. As though illuminated by a ray of sunlight entering a pitch-dark room, I saw the man as he really was—his hidden thoughts—his schemes—his villainy—lay bare before me. Beneath his bluff, hearty mask was a soul filled with avarice, cunning and treachery. Having paved the way by inducing me to announce my departure openly, thus making sure that no awkward questions would follow my disappearance, he intended to murder me the moment the treasure was unearthed, and with one swift, well-aimed shot rid himself of an inconvenient witness and a sharer in the spoil. The rev-

elation was so sudden and unexpected that for a moment I was stunned.

" 'What have you found, my friend?' The smooth, oily voice roused me. 'Is it gold?—a jewel?'

" 'Something more precious than either,' I answered swiftly. 'Why are you aiming a loaded revolver at me from beneath your cloak?'

"The unctuous smirk vanished from his face as his jaw sagged open. I saw a quick movement of his hand beneath his cloak and had barely time to duck before a shot rang out and a bullet smacked against the wall behind me. Before the echoes of the explosion had died away I had drawn my own weapon and shot him dead.

"LEAVING his body lying before the altar, I slipped the Glass of Truth into my pocket and quitted the sanctuary, hastily filling in the pit we had dug in order to enter. That night I rode fast and far, and by daylight I found myself in a little seaport on the Gulf of Petali. There I sold my horse and with the proceeds paid my passage to Messina by a small tramp steamer that was on the point of sailing. In Sicily it did not take me long to find a gambling-hell where, thanks to my magic glass, I won in an hour enough to carry me to the more palatial casinos of the Riviera. I could easily have broken the bank at each, but I dreaded attracting attention, so contented myself with modest stakes, reserving the bulk of my winnings for big deals on the stock markets of different European capitals. In less than a year I was a wealthy man.

"But the mere accumulation of money gave me little satisfaction; I wanted to turn my marvelous gift to some purpose that would bring lasting benefit to humanity. Then came the great disillusionment. Travel where I would, search as I might, everywhere I saw the same deceit, guile, and greed in the hearts of those with whom I came into contact. Few indeed were there from whom I did not shrink with disgust when I examined them through my magic glass; I almost despaired of humanity until I chanced upon a young artist who had given up his hopes of inheriting his father's millions that he might earn his livelihood by his own talents. But he was on the point of ruining his happiness by marrying a worthless woman whose only aim was a life of wealth and luxury. This unscrupulous harpy, in order to effect her purpose, had acquired the pictures of a struggling artist and passed them off as her own work. The masterpieces you so admired as the work of Lady Vanda were in reality painted by Mary Deane, the girl to whose devoted nursing you owe your life."

THE effect of the Count's words was galvanic. During the unfolding of the story, amazement, incredulity and doubt had in turn shown on the young man's mobile features; but as he now struggled to his feet, his shining eyes and flushed face told that belief had prevailed over the sober dictates of common sense.

"What would I not give to possess the Eye of Truth!" he cried. "By its aid I could solve the deepest mysteries—read the hearts of all men—control the stock markets of the world—back the winning horse in every race! I could discover the hidden virtues and beauties of the world——"

"And likewise its hatreds, its sins, its miseries!" Count Roulette shook his head as he laid his hand kindly on Frank's shoulder. "Seek not too deep a knowledge, my young friend. If the Eye of Truth can show you the path to happiness, believe me, it can do no more."

"No more?" the other gasped, his face

blank with surprize. "Could I not discover every gold mine in the world?—unearth secret treasures——?"

"One treasure—one inestimable treasure—may yet be yours."

The old man raised his voice as he called the name of Mary Deane, and as the girl approached, looking curiously from one to the other, he held the Eye of Truth between her and Frank so that each looked at the other through its crystal disk.

For a full minute they stood there gazing into each other's eyes and reading there the secret that their lips had never uttered. Then, without speaking, Frank leant forward and caught her slender body in his arms, bending his head until her trembling lips fluttered up to his.

"And now," said Count Roulette softly, "it is time for us to part."

Frank turned quickly at the sound of the word.

"Part? Surely not so soon?" There was genuine regret in his voice. "You have brought such happiness into my life that I am loth to say good-bye. Besides, I should like to have a few more peeps through that wonderful glass of yours."

There was a whimsical expression on the Count's face as he shook his head.

"No, no, my young friend. You had better rest content with what you have already seen. The Eye of Truth has shown you how to be happy—it can do no more. Remember, it is a wise lover—and a still wiser husband—that does not see too much!" He held out both hands to them as he went on: "My mission here is ended. At sundown my yacht sails from Monte Carlo, and it is unlikely that our paths in life will cross again. So farewell to you both, my children. . . . Farewell!"

SOME three hours later, as the dying sun was drooping toward the horizon, a white-painted yacht crept into sight round the distant rocky headland of Monaco, and steamed westward along the coast. It was Count Roulette leaving for his unknown destination.

Standing hand in hand on the balcony of the bungalow, Mary Deane and Frank watched it draw abreast of them, and saw the tiny flag at the masthead dip thrice in silent salute. Then the bows of the *Veritas* swung seaward and the dainty craft grew gradually smaller and dimmer until its trailing plume of smoke merged into the shadows of the coming night.

The Eye of Truth had passed, but it had left behind a legacy of love and happiness that would only pass with life itself.

The Phantom Hand

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

An astounding novel of Black Magic, eery murders, and weird occult happenings.

The Story Thus Far

HURRYING home from China to Lorna West, to whom he is engaged, Don Wentworth is appalled to learn that her father, Senator Lemuel West, has paid the supreme penalty of the law for the murder of Police Captain Morse, who was investigating his political activities.

At Cannonville, West's home, he meets one Sudh Hafiz, a Persian in charge of a Babist temple, who informs him of a gang of conspirators who railroaded West to his doom. These consist of Moroni, the bootlegger; Walstein, the political boss; Abner Wells; and their leader, Godfrey Moore, the millionaire, a master of black magic.

Hafiz takes Don out to Moore's house, where he finds Lorna living, mentally deranged. She hardly knows him. That night, while Moroni is a guest at a television demonstration on Moore's radio, the phantom of West appears in place of the grand opera stage, and Moroni drops dead.

Next day, returning to Moore's house, Don and Hafiz find Moore tied up. He says Walstein has kidnapped Lorna and taken her to Moroni's headquarters, where he has gone to search for Moroni's secret papers. The two follow to the lonely cabin on the shore, and are surprized and bound. Lorna becomes entranced and West's phantom appears while the search is proceeding, and attacks Walstein, who, thinking Moroni's men have assaulted him, engages in a duel with them, ending in his death and that of the three others. Don rescues Lorna.

The story continues:

IT WAS on the evening of the day of Walstein's death. Don had brought Lorna back to Sudh Hafiz's house and laid her on the lounge in the living-room. The girl had been in the same automaton-like condition as when he had seen her in the vault of Moroni's hangout. She had obeyed all Don's requests, but she had seemed to have become a mere machine.

She had stepped quietly out of the car and gone into the house, and Don had laid her down. Sudh Hafiz had mixed her a sherbet, and she had drunk it at Don's instructions, after which she had seemed to fall asleep.

"It is a powerful Oriental drug," Sudh Hafiz explained. "It has the exactly opposite effect of hashish and opium—that is to say, it binds the soul more tightly to the body, instead of loosing it. It may be that she will awaken well again."

"In which case I shall ask her to marry me immediately," said Don.

While Lorna slept, the two men had discussed the situation. It was not likely that the bodies of Walstein and the three other dead men would be discovered for a considerable time, since there was no reason to suppose that Walstein had gone to Moroni's hangout. Already Moore had succeeded in doing away with two of his confederates in crime, and there remained only Abner Wells, the ex-candidate for mayor on the "silk-stocking" ticket. If Don was to clear Senator West's name,

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July

"He flicked his fingers, and a tongue of white flame leaped from the disk, stinging Don like a whip."

it was essential that Abner Wells should live.

A hasty glance at the papers taken from the cellar showed that Wells was implicated in various shady transactions, but there was no proof that he had plotted the death of Captain Morse.

"It is essential," said Sudh Hafiz, "that Miss West shall not fall into Moore's hands again. It is only through her that her father's phantom can be materialized. You must marry her and take her away, Wentworth, and forego all thoughts of vengeance upon Moore for the present."

"That is my intention," answered Don.

"Our great need is to manage to get in touch with West. If we could talk to him, and convince him that his blind, murderous attacks upon his persecutors are defeating their own ends, that only by letting Abner Wells live can we hope to obtain the evidence that will clear him. . . . But unfortunately it is only through his daughter that he can be reached, and that means throwing her into her state of catalepsy."

"No more of that," said Don.

"Then—we can do nothing."

"How about frightening Wells by telling him we know all about his involvement in the Cannonville Traction deal, letting him think we know more than we do?" asked Don. "If we could get him as an ally on our side, with the promise of immunity——"

"Suppose you take Miss West away first," answered the Persian. "Marry her, restore her to health, give her a chance to forget. Then we'll see what can be done. Remember, Godfrey Moore knows you are his most bitter enemy. He has struck twice, and successfully. As soon as he has disposed of Abner Wells, he will try to put you out of the way. Let us see what is the effect of the drug I have given her."

"DON, you've come back! I've wanted you so!"

Don, overjoyed to find Lorna in her right mind at last, kneeled down beside her and put his arms about her.

"Where are we, Don? How long have you been back in America? I—I've been ill, I think."

"You've been ill, dear. I only returned yesterday. I hurried back as soon as I was set free by the brigands who captured me in China. You knew about that?"

"Oh yes, Don, and I was so anxious about you. I—I don't seem to remember much after—what happened. The shock of it must have unhinged me, I think. I remember Mr. Moore was kind enough to offer me a home, but—this isn't his home, is it?"

"No, this is the house of Sudh Hafiz——"

"The Persian. Of course I know him. He was very kind to poor father when he—oh, I can't bear to think about that! If only you'd been able to come in time! But how did I get here?"

"I took you away from Mr. Moore's house this morning, Lorna. I told him that I felt I had a better right than anybody else to care for you. I want you to marry me, dear, right away. Don't you remember we agreed to be married as soon as I returned?"

"Don, I can never marry you now. Not until poor father's name has been cleared. And that may never be."

"Lorna, your father was innocent. You and I know it. What do we care what others believe? I am going to make it my life task to clear him. But I want you as my wife, Lorna."

"Don, it wouldn't be right. It would be a millstone about your neck."

"I like that sort of millstone, dear. Say 'yes.' "

"But not—not today, Don. Let us wait till I am stronger. I feel so weak. I'd just be a burden."

"Lorna, dear, if you don't marry me I'll never be able to begin my work on behalf of your father." He turned as Sudh Hafiz, who had left the room, appeared in the doorway. "I think I'm going to persuade Miss West to marry me tonight," he said. "It's still possible to marry in this state without a preliminary waiting, isn't it? It was when I went away. We'd planned to be married the day that I came back."

"It's still possible," smiled Sudh Hafiz. "Well, Miss West, I'm glad to see you looking so much better."

"I shall never cease to be grateful to you for your kindness to poor father," said the girl. "I'd do anything to show my gratitude."

"Then marry Don Wentworth, and you'll never regret it," replied the Persian promptly. "I can get the Reverend Mr. Suydam here in ten minutes, have you

married in twenty, the wedding supper in an hour, and see you off on your honeymoon in my car inside of an hour and a half."

"But my clothes—unless they're here, I don't know——"

"I guess they're at Godfrey Moore's," said Don, "but you don't need to worry about them, darling. If you can last till tomorrow we'll stop at some large town and I'll buy you a complete trousseau."

"But I haven't even a toothbrush," said Lorna.

"If you'll only marry me first, I promise you a dozen toothbrushes, darling, before midnight. Come, say that little word."

"Yes," said Lorna.

"You'd better lie down and rest till Mr. Suydam gets here," suggested Sudh Hafiz. "I'll 'phone him at once." He drew Don into the next room. "I don't altogether like this," he said in a low voice.

"My getting married?"

"No, this sudden improvement. It's too good. There should normally be a slight confusion of mind. It looks to me——" he hesitated.

"Go on," said Don.

"——as if a certain entity was in charge, and letting her come through in order to conceal the fact of his presence."

"You mean Lemuel West?" asked Don aghast.

"No, I don't. That's the worst of it. Lemuel West would never harm her, though he makes use of her. No, I mean an entity sent by Moore."

"I'll take care of that entity," answered Don, smiling. Again he was beginning to discount the Persian's suggestions, for Lorna's recovery had made the past once more begin to seem incredible. Sudh Hafiz, without answering, went to the telephone.

"Mr. Suydam will be here in half an hour," he said to Don, who had stolen back to see Lorna again.

"She's fallen asleep," said Don. "It's just as well there will be a little delay."

"She'll need a lot of taking care of," answered Hafiz. "Above all, you must do your best to discourage her father from manifesting."

He crossed to a cabinet in the room and took from it a bottle containing some tiny pellets. "I fixed these up for you just now," he said. "Give her two, morning and evening. It is the same drug I gave her this afternoon. Hello!" he added, as the door-bell rang. "That can't be Mr. Suydam!"

He went to open it, admitting an elderly man with a fine, sensitive face, a small, drooping mustache, blue eyes and thinning silvery-gray hair. The newcomer looked from the one man to the other.

"I take it you are Mr. Hafiz and you are Mr. Wentworth," he said in bitter tones. "My name is Abner Wells. No need to ask if you have heard of me."

"I certainly have," said Don.

"Won't you come in and sit down?" inquired Sudh Hafiz.

"I'll come in, but I won't sit down." Abner Wells entered the room, turned and faced Don. "I understand that you have been circulating libelous statements about me, Mr. Wentworth," he cried.

"That is absolutely false," said Don. "I only got back from China yesterday, and at the time I hadn't heard your name. May I ask who your informant is?"

"That makes no difference. I believe the statement to be true!" Abner Wells's face grew white. He raised his fist. "Let me warn you, young man, you and that Walstein fellow had better draw in your horns!" he shouted. "I've got influence enough in this city to break Walstein and his gang."

SUDH HAFIZ stepped to the door and closed it. He came back. "Walstein's dead," he said.

Abner Wells's face grew whiter. He staggered back as if he had received a mortal blow.

"Wh-when did it happen?" he asked in a shocked whisper.

"He went to Moroni's hangout after his death, to look through his papers," answered Sudh Hafiz. "He wanted to get hold of all papers that might incriminate him; among others, that one that you were so incautious as to sign, relative to the Cannonville Traction deal, now in our possession. But he was chiefly afraid that Moroni might have been in possession of evidence that would link him up with the murder of Captain Morse."

Abner Wells uttered a strangled cry. His face looked ghastly.

"A quarrel arose between Walstein and his man Benny, and two of Moroni's men. They shot and stabbed it out in the cellar and killed one another. But let me speak more plainly, Mr. Wells," continued the Persian. "You are a very different type of man from Walstein and Moroni. You know that Godfrey Moore's researches in the Black Art are not mere dabbling in superstition, but hideously real. You have the faculty of putting two and two together. Next to Moore, you are the most intelligent of all those implicated in railroading poor West to the gallows——"

"It's a damned lie!" gurgled Wells.

"It's true," said Sudh Hafiz suavely. "And you are able to see that the death of Moroni and Walstein leaves Moore at the mercy of only one man, yourself. And that your own chances of prolonged life are what we may call slender."

Now Abner Wells was silent. His lean face was working, his sensitive eyes alight with intelligence. It was plain that he was doing some rapid thinking.

"I think it may be to your advantage to come to terms with us, Mr. Wells," said Hafiz.

Abner Wells looked at him searchingly. But at that moment the bell rang again, and the Persian admitted the Reverend Mr. Suydam, a jovial, elderly clergyman in clerical attire. He shook hands with Abner Wells, whom, of course, he knew, and, much more cordially, with Don.

"I have heard about you, Mr. Wentworth," he said. "Your kidnapping by those Chinese brigands caused quite a sensation in Cannonville. I shall be delighted to marry you and Miss West immediately, poor thing. It was sad, most sad, and I congratulate her on obtaining a husband of such sterling integrity as yourself, Mr. Wentworth."

"I guess I'm the person to be congratulated," answered Don.

Suydam smiled. "You have two witnesses, I suppose?" he asked.

"Why, there's my boy," said Hafiz

"Pray permit me to be the other," interposed Wells. "It will be a great pleasure, I assure you, if I may be allowed."

"Why, that will be charming of you, Mr. Wells," said the clergyman. "The sooner the better. You've got the ring, of course? No, I'll bet——"

"Yes," answered Don, laughing as he produced the little circlet of gold. "I bought it before I left Cannonville, and kept it hidden about me all the while I was in the brigands' hands."

"You see," smiled Sudh Hafiz, "Miss West is getting a husband who has his wits about him."

THE ceremony was over. Don couldn't believe it. No extraordinary change had taken place in Lorna, standing at his side, smiling, and apparently fully restored to her normal health. And he

felt just the same. Odd that one could be married and feel no different!

Jolly Mr. Suydam had kissed the bride and was preparing to depart when Abner Wells gestured to Don and Hafiz to step aside. "What you said about coming to terms——" he began. "I'm ready. This has got to be settled." His face was agitated. "Can you gentlemen come around to my apartment at once and talk things over?"

Don looked at Hafiz. The Persian had an inspiration. He turned to the clergyman.

"It's unfortunate," he said, "but a most important matter of business has cropped up, concerning Miss West. I wonder whether we couldn't ask you to stay with her here for half an hour while we are gone. You'll understand, it's a matter that won't permit of delay——"

"I can quite understand," Suydam responded. "I shall be more than delighted to remain here with Miss West—come, come, my dear friend, you mean Mrs. Wentworth!—until you gentlemen are back."

Don went up to Lorna and explained, but the girl looked at him a little reproachfully.

"Must you leave me, dear?" she asked imploringly.

"For half an hour—three-quarters at the most," said Don. "It's something that cropped up—I can't tell you now, dear, but it's unavoidable."

"I suppose you must, then, Don," said the girl. "But I shall be afraid all the while you are gone. I don't ever want us to be separated again as long as we live."

"I hope we never shall be, dearest," responded Don. "You're an angel to stand for it at such a time. But you won't be afraid with Mr. Suydam."

"No, I won't be afraid with Mr. Suydam," answered the girl mechanically.

"I have my car outside," said Wells. "We can reach my apartment in five minutes."

They went out. It was already growing dark. Hafiz got in beside Wells, Don seated himself in the rear, and in a few minutes they parked outside Wells's apartment, in one of the finest apartment-houses in Cannonville.

"My sister keeps house for me," said Wells, "but she's out this evening and we shall not be disturbed."

THE elevator deposited them on the fifth floor, and Wells opened his door and ushered them in. The living-room showed the tastes of a gentleman and a scholar. The rugs and color scheme were of the finest. Old prints hung on the walls, and the library was not of the kind that is purchased in sets wholesale.

Abner Wells waved Don and Sudh Hafiz to chairs and drew up his own opposite them. He looked at them in his searching way, saying nothing for a while, and they looked back at him. Abner Wells, the blue-stocking politician and reformer, was a man of considerable intelligence.

"You think you've got me cornered," he said slowly, showing his teeth. "I'm not so sure. What do you want to propose?"

"We've got you on that traction deal, of course," said Sudh Hafiz.

Abner Wells uttered a cool laugh. "So you've found the reformer as bad as the rest of them, eh?" he asked. "I rate your intelligence higher than that, gentlemen. You may have all the papers you like, but you'll never bring that home to me. Now, between friends—at least, provisional friends—what next?"

"I am speaking in the dark," said Sudh Hafiz, and his voice took on a purr of complacency. "I don't know whether, in the matter of the conspiracy to send West to the gallows——"

"I refuse to accept that word!" shouted Abner, who had evidently recovered from his first fears and had devised what he considered a way out of his dilemma.

"——whether you have the goods on Godfrey Moore, or whether he has the goods on you, but in either case I think you will read a warning in the deaths of Moroni and Walstein."

"How do I know Walstein's dead?" demanded Abner.

"If you don't know, you'll soon learn of his disappearance. Come, let us have done with fencing."

"What's your game? Lay your cards on the table."

"My game, as you call it," answered Don, "is to clear a dead man's name."

Abner Wells looked at him closely. "Excuse me for a moment, gentlemen," he said, and left the room. Within two minutes he was back.

"I accept your statement that Walstein is dead," he said. He was shaking, in spite of his affected nonchalance. "What do you offer?"

Sudh Hafiz leaned forward. "I know," he said, "that you were the least guilty in the conspiracy against poor West." This time Abner Wells made no attempt to refute the charge. "Help us bring the proofs home to Godfrey Moore. Help us for your own sake, for otherwise he will assuredly kill you."

He turned to Don. "I think in such event we can offer Mr. Wells immunity?" he asked.

Don nodded. "I'll pledge myself to that," he answered.

"And how, pray, do you imagine that Godfrey Moore has the power to take my life?" asked Abner. "I am no fool, gentlemen, though I may have given you the impression of being one."

"I don't know," answered Sudh Hafiz, "how far Moore has initiated you into his devilish practises, but I do know that you, like many another apparently hard-boiled business man, are well aware that there is another world than this. You have consulted mediums habitually, you have seen and talked to the spirit of your dead son——"

"Oh God!" cried Abner Wells, and dropped his face into his hands. When he raised it, a moment later, it was the face of an old man, drawn and gray.

"Gentlemen," he whispered, "that devil has me in his power. Yes, I know—I know that he encompassed the death of West. And I know how. Do you?"

The Persian nodded. "He can do that to you," he said. "Just as he sent West's astral to kill Captain Morse while poor West was drugged and unconscious in his house, so he can send yours upon another hellish mission."

"I have no proofs, no papers that will incriminate Moore. But I'll help you. I'll do everything I can. God, this has been a long nightmare! What do you want me to do?"

"When the time comes, I'll tell you," answered Hafiz. "For the present, we have your pledge, and you have ours of immunity."

THEY left Wells seated in his chair, looking ten years older than when they had entered the room with him, and walked back briskly toward the house of Sudh Hafiz.

"We didn't learn much," said Don.

"No, and I think Wells was telling the truth when he said he had no proofs against Moore. But at least we have found out where he stands, and, even if he breaks his pledge, I think we have taken the life out of his opposition. Now, my dear fellow, you must have a whole month of honeymoon with that little bride of yours. If you see any evidences of trance, if her father takes possession of her, ignore him. He will not harm you,

"When you come back, we shall endeavor to get into touch with Lemuel West in other ways, and bring him to a realization of the fact that he is dead, and only furthering Moore's devilish schemes by letting himself be used as a tool by him. Meanwhile, I shall be at work in his interests and Lorna's."

"How do you think it may be possible to get into touch with him?" asked Don.

"I believe," answered Sudh Hafiz, "that if we are unable to bring him into touch with us on earth, one of us may have to go down into the shadow world in order to communicate with him more freely. But that is a fearful journey for a living man to make, and few indeed have made it successfully and returned, as the old Greek myth of Orpheus attests. But that is part of the training we received from my Master, who is even now watching from his retreat in my own country. I know how to do it."

"You said 'One of us'," said Don. "I'm willing—anything that I can do to clear poor West's name."

Sudh Hafiz hesitated. "Wentworth," he answered, "I am able to speak to you more frankly than hitherto. It is strange, but the Akashic Mirror, in which I can get fragmentary glimpses of the immediate future, seems to indicate that you will be that one. I don't exactly understand it. But I foresee that all will, in the end, be well." His tone became less grave. "I believe that when you return, Mrs. Wentworth will be fully restored to health," he said. "Have you made your plans for the trip?"

"I'm thinking of driving along the coast road to Florida," answered Don. "I want to motor hard and fast for a few days, so as to get as far from here as possible, and give Lorna a complete change of scene."

"A very wise decision. You'll use my car, of course."

"Why," stammered Don, "I was thinking of buying one tonight. I really couldn't deprive you——"

"No deprivation. I must insist on it. Just bring her out of the house, step into the car, and away you go. And here I must say *au revoir,* Wentworth," he added.

They had reached the outside of the temple, from within which a soft glow was proceeding. Three or four persons were already ascending the steps. A man looked back and nodded to Sudh Hafiz.

"Yes, this is one of the nights for our regular services," said the Persian, "and I'm a little late as it is. Convey my warmest regards to your bride, Wentworth, and when you return, come straight to the house."

Sudh Hafiz gripped his hand, and before Don could urge him to come in and say good-bye to Lorna, he had passed up the steps into the interior of the temple, from which the soft strains of the organ had begun to roll.

Standing there, looking after him, Don suddenly became conscious of fears for Lorna. Could anything have happened to her in the short time he had been away? His heart beginning to pulsate violently, he hurried to the door of Hafiz's house.

He was immensely relieved when, at his knock, old Mr. Suydam opened it to him almost immediately, for the smiling, benevolent face of the clergyman told him that all was well.

"Well, here you are back already!" exclaimed Suydam. "You'll be surprized to hear that your little wife is sleeping soundly. Poor child, she seemed all tired out with the excitement of being married! She asked me to lower the lights, said that they hurt her eyes. You must be very gentle and patient with her at first, Wentworth. But I know that being married to the man of her heart is the best

tonic she could have," he added, smiling.

But fear was again hammering at the gates of Don's heart. Why had Lorna asked to have the lights lowered? Was it possible that Lemuel West was again obsessing her, within an hour of their marriage? He strode swiftly into the drawing-room.

Then his relief was like a physical pang as he saw Lorna, his very own Lorna, asleep, curled up in the big chair, and her own sweet face instead of that ghastly, hate-distorted one of Lemuel West's that he had been afraid of finding.

He stood there for a moment, looking down at her in the ecstasy of his reaction. He vowed that he would win her back to health and strength and happiness. He would fight the devil Moore and beat him. But for the present—only Lorna.

She opened her eyes and smiled at him. "I knew that you were there, even when I was asleep," she said. "I had rather a bad dream, Don. I dreamed that they had taken you away from me—or me from you."

"Never, dearest," answered Don. "I'm with you." He knelt down beside her for a moment, took her hand, and pressed it to his lips. "Always, Lorna. Do you feel well enough to start now?"

"Yes, I'm well enough. I'm really quite well, except that I have such wretched dreams. But I'm not going to have them any more. I'm quite resolved on that. I do feel tired, but I shall be so happy with you. Where are we going, Don?"

"To Florida," answered Don. "Do you like the idea of that, Lorna?"

"I think it will be great," she answered enthusiastically. "But where are we going to stop tonight?"

"At Evansville. Do you know it? It's only forty miles from here, and we can be there in almost no time. There's a good hotel there, too. And as soon as I've got you to bed, I'm going out to buy you a toothbrush, and anything else that you require," he added, laughing.

Lorna rose and put her arms about his neck. "You're always so good to me, Don," she said.

She was so slight and frail, he felt a rush of pity. Impulsively he picked her up and strode with her past the genially waving Mr. Suydam, and carried her to the sedan, which stood outside.

"I'm going to put you in the rear seat, dearest," he said. "You'll be able to sleep there."

He tucked her into a big rug that was folded on the seat, and made her lean her head against the corner of the cushions. He closed the door, got in the front, and took the wheel. In another moment the car was rolling softly away along the main road that ran inland about four miles from the coast.

ONCE or twice he glanced around, to see that Lorna was sleeping comfortably. But his heart misgave him as he realized how frail she looked. He would have to take the greatest care of her. It was going to be a longer task than he had thought, bringing her back to health, and a month would be barely long enough.

He would take her to some seaside place in Florida—not the Florida of the tourists, but the strip that lies west of the Floridan peninsula. There, in the bracing air, with the warm sun and the sea, Lorna would come back to her old self and forget the dreadful tragedy that had seared her life.

And he himself resolved to put all thoughts of the matter out of his mind till his return. He, too, had been under a fearful strain, and that strain must necessarily react upon Lorna.

He looked back again, but he could see nothing but the faint outlines of her now,

for they had left the street lights far behind, and were passing through the desolate pine forests. Thank heaven he must be half-way to Evansville! He pressed down the accelerator, and sent the sedan up to fifty-five, sixty, sixty-five miles an hour.

But what was he hurrying for? There was nothing wrong with Lorna. He was fleeing as if she was mortally ill and in need of a doctor. That was absurd. He slowed down again, came to a stop, looked back.

"Lorna!" he called.

There came no answer. She was asleep, she must be asleep, he told himself. He leaned back over the rear of the front seat and laid his hand upon the rug.

"Lorna, dear!" he said.

No answer still. He could just see the outlines of her body, but they were dimmer than they had any right to be under that brilliant moon. He touched the rug again. God, it folded inward! It collapsed as if there were nothing under it!

And suddenly Don became aware that there was nothing under it. Lorna was gone!

Fallen out of the car? No! The door was not only closed fast, but locked! And yet she was not there! Frantically Don climbed over the rear seat, and the rug collapsed under his hands, showing the seat beneath it!

Don stood back in horror, trying to make his brain function. Lorna had been there and was gone, and she could not have fallen out of the car. She seemed to have dematerialized into thin air!

And, as he stood back, he saw that she was there after all, a phantom, her eyes closed in sleep, looking infinitely weak and wan and tired.

He clutched at her, and his arms passed through her and met.

A wild cry broke from him. He thought he was going mad. He shrank back. There she was again, huddled up in the corner. But this time she opened her eyes and smiled at him, and extended her arms toward him.

And again his arms encountered only empty air!

Then of a sudden, as he stood there, he heard voices, infinitely far away, low, and yet clear, and seeming to emanate from within his brain rather than from any objective place. It was like voices heard over the telephone when a connection is faulty.

"You tell me I'm with you? I tell you I'm with him. I'm in the car with him. I love him. He's my husband!"

And that was Lorna's voice, and, as she spoke, once more the astral double in the car smiled at Don, as if it responded instantly to the thoughts of the living woman far away.

"I tell you you're in my power. You'll do as I tell you if you ever want to see him again!" And that was the voice of Godfrey Moore.

"I'm in your power no longer," came Lorna's voice, sweet but faint. "I was in your power once, but I'm awake now. I want him."

"I'll bring him to you."

"You'll bring him—here?"

"I'll bring him here, to show you that I have complete control over him. After that you'll let your father come to me."

"Not while I live!"

"Not while you live?" answered Godfrey Moore's voice mockingly. And then suddenly Don was aware that it was addressing him.

"You fool," it said, "to have thought you could thwart me! Your life was in my hands last night. What did you want to interfere for? I'm giving you your chance now, your last chance. Get out and stay out! Lorna is with me. She

slipped out of the car when you slowed down a mile from my house on the upper road, and I left her double with you to mock you. Watch it! Watch carefully, Don Wentworth." His voice took on the singsong of a conjurer. "Now you see it! Now you don't!"

It was horrible, but the astral form of Lorna seemed responsive to Moore's words. One moment he saw her in the corner of the rear seat, smiling at him, the next she was gone.

And now she was gone without returning, and Moore's mocking voice was in Don's ears again:

"You thought to corrupt Abner Wells! You fatuous fool, playing with fire and not knowing it. I offer you your last chance of life. Drive, drive like the devil and be out of the state by morning. Otherwise you die."

"Liar!" screamed Don. He lost all self-control, he pounded the cushions with his fists, as if they had been Godfrey Moore. "Liar and devil! I'm coming to you, if all the fiends of hell are at your back!"

He heard Moore's faint laugh of derision, and, fainter still, a cry of appeal from Lorna.

"Come along, Wentworth," came Moore's answer. "I knew you'd come. There's a warm welcome waiting for you. You'll learn what it means to cross me. You'll find your wife here, only it won't be quite the same as you expect. There's a crossroad a mile back from where you are that runs right into my private road a hundred yards from my house. Come, and welcome!"

The voice died away. Don was staring at the empty seat in front of him.

HE TURNED the car and drove back, found the crossroad that he had passed without noticing, and drove like a madman through the pines southward toward the sea. Was he crazed? Had Lorna fallen from the car after all? It mattered nothing. Don knew that so long as Godfrey Moore lived, one living devil bestrode the earth, and he meant to throttle him with his own hands, if he were hanged for it.

On and on along the dirt trail through the desolate pine forests Don drove, fury in his heart and madness in his brain, until of a sudden he saw Moore's private road before him, and Moore's house, ablaze with lights, and he was forced to jam on the brakes with all his might, to prevent shooting across the concrete way into the mud flats beyond.

With grinding, screeching brakes Don brought the car to a standstill at the very edge of the concrete, backed and turned. Looking round from force of habit as he straightened out the car, he saw the shadowy outlines of Lorna's double behind him once again.

And again he heard those faint voices:

"He is coming to me."

"I told you I had complete control over him, that I would bring him."

"He's coming of his free will because he loves me."

"His love will avail you nothing."

"It will avail me everything, because our love is stronger than your evil powers. My eyes are open now. You thought you'd killed the soul in me, but it exists and it defies you."

Don heard Godfrey Moore's scornful laugh ring out. Then it seemed as if Lorna was at the phantom telephone alone.

"Don, dearest. Don, where are you? I feel you near me, but I can not see you."

"I'm here, Lorna," Don whispered, and, mad with eagerness though he was to go on to Moore's house, he could not but wait there until she had finished speaking. And now he could see her double in the

rear seat again, smiling at him. Involuntarily he put out his hand to touch her, but it passed through empty air. Don knew that was not Lorna, only a simulacrum, having no more of her personality than a picture might have had. It was her love for him that had flung it there upon the screen of the night.

"I'm here, Lorna," Don whispered again.

"Go back, Don. He is stronger than we are. He can kill our bodies, but he can never kill our souls."

"I'm coming to you, Lorna. My place is at your side. If he can kill us, we'll die together."

The answering sigh was very faint and far away. Next moment the simulacrum had vanished. Don was alone.

He drove the car through the gates and up the drive beneath the live-oaks, trailing their festoons of moss, brought it to a halt before the house, and leaped out. Before him stood the open entrance doors, and a shaft of brilliant light shone out.

With three bounds Don was up the steps and inside. "I've come," he cried. "I'm here, Godfrey Moore, I'm here!"

There came no answer, and Don pushed through into the long drawing-room, with the radio set in the corner and the blue velvet portieres. "Lorna!" he cried. "Lorna!" But the room beyond was empty, and the next, and the next, and beyond that the door gave upon a passage leading into the kitchen on one side, and running straight past it to another door, some distance away.

The house seemed empty, but as Don called Lorna's name again, he thought he heard the faint, mocking echo of Moore's laugh. He grew silent, and the laugh was not repeated.

Infuriated, he shouted his challenge. "I'm here, Godfrey Moore, I'm here!" he called again. "You dared me to come, and I'm here, to fight it out with you to the last!"

Still silence, and Don turned and began stamping through the rooms on the lower floor, shouting Moore's name and Lorna's alternately. But there was no one there, and presently he found himself back in the passage.

He stopped irresolutely. Behind him he could see the staircase running up to the bedrooms, but it was not likely that Moore or Lorna would be there. His heart sank as it occurred to him that Moore might have been playing a trick on him, that Lorna had been spirited away far from the house, that he had been drawn there on a fool's errand.

"Moore, damn you, you shan't escape me! By God, I'll follow you to the ends of the earth!" he cried. "Where are you skulking?"

"Is that you, Wentworth?" Moore's bland voice sounded suddenly, as if in Don's ear, so that he whirled about, only to realize that he was still alone.

"I'm here! Where are you?" shouted Don.

"Pray excuse me, my dear fellow! I didn't expect you'd be here so soon. Yes, I have your wife with me. Poor child, she came to me in sudden panic. She didn't like the idea of being married—to you. She slipped out of your car and dashed away through the pines——"

"You can save your breath, Moore. No need to lie!" cried Don.

"Why, Wentworth, that's a word I don't like," answered Moore's voice blandly. "But I realize that the situation must be a painful one for you. Let's talk it over like gentlemen. I can't come to you for the moment. Can you come to me?"

"I'll go to hell for you, Moore," said Don, and he heard a throaty chuckle in response.

"Odd that you should have tried all doors but the right one, Wentworth. The one at the end of the passage. There, straight in front of you. It's my laboratory, my den, whatever you like to call it."

Don, without replying, strode down the corridor until he reached the door. Now he saw a tiny window in the wall overhead, admitting a modicum of light, and through it he could see the low bluff at the back of the house. He had not guessed the building ran back so far. Moore's den must be actually hollowed out of the rocky bluff above him, and deep in the earth.

ONE moment, with his hand upon the door, Don hesitated. It was not fear. It was rather the realization that he was on the verge of committing Lorna and himself irrevocably, that he was about to step consciously into a trap.

He knew it, but the surge of blind fury that filled him, blinded him, made him reckless of the consequences.

He flung the door open and passed through.

Nothing! Darkness! But Don heard the door click fast behind him, and he shouted again, "I'm here, Moore! Show yourself! Don't skulk in the dark! Do your worst! I'm ready for you!"

Again he heard that throaty chuckle, and then of a sudden the room was filled with blinding, dazzling light. But it was not ordinary light intensified to the nth power. It was a light that could be felt, that exerted pressure on all sides of him at the same time; light that seemed to hold him like a trap of steel wires, and at the same time made it impossible for him to open his eyes.

He tried to take a step forward. He tried to extend his hands to grope his way. He could move, but it was as if the wire trap moved with him, still imprisoning him. Gradually he managed to get his eyes partly open. The light was less intolerable. It seemed to be exercising pressure upon his eyelids, but it did not sear his eyes.

Minutes went by in silence. Little by little Don got his eyes open at last. He could see now. The light was no longer dazzling, but it was brighter than any light he had ever seen—brighter in a different way. A mellow, soft, and infinitely piercing light that seemed to penetrate through and through him.

Now Don could take in his surroundings. He was in a small room, excavated in the rock, for overhead was rock shored up by beams. There was nothing in the room but glass. The walls were covered with glass mirrors, set at slightly different angles, so that Don could see himself duplicated and reduplicated a hundred times, could see every inch of his body from all possible angles.

In front of him was a long triangular frame of what looked like glass, extending horizontally the entire width of the room, and laid about four feet from the floor, being supported upon a number of tripods. Behind this prism the light streamed through a narrow slit in the far wall, yet it was so intolerably bright that it illumined the entire room.

On the far side of the prism it entered, white sunlight, but from the side nearer Don it emerged in the seven component colors into which sunlight is dissolved by a prism. Violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red, each color was perfectly distinct, and running through them were the black lines of the solar spectrum.

At each end there was a gap, and Don knew enough of physics to be aware that these represented the invisible ultra-violet and ultra-red rays respectively.

There came a click, a purring sound, and suddenly Don found himself held as

in a vise. New beams of light were streaming in on him from every side, pressing upon him so that movement was all but impossible.

And in that light Don had a singular feeling as if his bones were being turned to marrow. He felt weak and helpless. He had neither the will nor the power to struggle.

Again there sounded Moore's malicious chuckle, as if coming from within the room. "Well, you're here, Wentworth," came the taunting words. "You stepped into the trap. There's no Black Magic here, my friend, simply a new scientific process of which I am the inventor, though I do not intend to patent it.

"The disintegrating powers of light, rightly applied, are generally known. The earthworm shrivels up and dies when exposed for a moderate time to sunlight. Light kills most germs. And you, my dear friend, though your knowledge is not profound, have probably heard of ectoplasm, that exudes from the body of a medium during a séance. If so, you are aware that the slightest approach to sunlight causes it to disappear immediately.

"This ectoplasm—pardon me if I am explicit, but it is a pleasure to have a moderately intelligent man to talk to—this ectoplasm has been analyzed, and has been found to be nothing mysterious or ghostly, but the primal basis of all matter. It is subject therefore to all the conditions of the physical world. The light which is now being applied to yourself, Wentworth, is of a nature discovered by myself. It is of a series of ray lengths midway between sunlight and the X-ray, ordinarily invisible, but made visible by certain processes into which I need not enter.

"Its purpose is to effect such a disintegration of your own ectoplasmic contents, that they will be automatically disunited from your physical organism. In briefer words, this is an apparatus for separating—painlessly separating—the body from its double, or astral.

"Since you have challenged me, Wentworth, it is my intention to reduce you to the after-death condition, in which state I hope to utilize your services for certain purposes of my own. After which I promise you that I shall give you back your body again and leave you free to depart."

Again that chuckle came from Moore's lips. Don, who had hardly understood what the man was saying, and only knew that he was trapped in some infernal mechanism, flung all his strength into a desperate effort to free himself.

If he could only reach the prism, not a dozen feet in front of him, smash it, or at least hurl it from its supporting tripods! . . . but his limbs were as heavy as lead, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he was able to raise his arms an inch.

Brighter grew the light and more intolerable. More and more intensely came that rending feeling. He could no longer stir now. He was in no pain, but an intense weakness and lethargy held him, and he would have fallen but for the feeling of being supported on all sides by steel wires.

Now strange prickles were coursing through all his arteries and sinews. His body began to grow numb, cold, dead. Only his brain was alive, but that seemed more vividly alive than ever before. Memories of his life, down to minute and long-forgotten details, rushed through it.

Then ensued a brief period of unconsciousness. Suddenly Don awoke. He found himself looking straight into his own eyes!

He was exterior to his body, which stood, a sagging, lifeless thing, in the

middle of the floor. And suddenly, as if released from the thongs of light that held it, it dropped. It lay upon the floor, inert and, to all appearances, dead.

And Don, standing over it, had never felt so well, so alive in every limb.

For a few moments, staring at the thing that had been he, he could not understand. Then suddenly the truth was borne in upon him. He was exteriorized. He was what the world called dead. He had become a phantom—yet a phantom that retained all the emotions, all the will and impulses of a living man, all the intense desire to find Lorna and save her from this fiend.

Suddenly he was aware that Godfrey Moore was in the room. Moore was in evening dress; he held a half-smoked cigar in his hand, and he was looking at the lifeless body upon the floor. He raised one foot, shod in patent leather, and kicked it meditatively.

But there was a change in Moore's appearance. When Don had first seen him, he had been struck by the man's benign appearance. Now, though his face was unaltered, Don seemed to see him from some interior point of vision, and the look on Moore's face was that of a devil.

Moore in the room, within reach of Don's fist, ignorant, apparently, that he was in his victim's power!

Don drew back his right fist and struck with all his might, straight from the shoulder. It was a haymaker that would have felled a strong man and staggered a Dempsey. To Don's dismay, the blow failed to perturb Moore in the slightest. His fist passed straight through Moore's face and stood out behind his head.

A cry of utter horror broke from Don's lips. At last he knew!

Moore raised his head and looked at Don fixedly. A sneering chuckle broke from him.

"I can just see you, my friend," he said. "You have taken a slight element of physical matter with you, so that the experiment has not been wholly a success, but you are sufficiently dematerialized for my purposes. And now, Wentworth"—Moore thrust his face forward till it was almost touching Don's—"now you are going to learn what it means to try to cross me!"

He raised one hand, revealing a sort of disk of black metal, not unlike a watch. He flicked his fingers, and a long tongue of white flame leaped from it, stinging Don like a whip.

Don hurled himself upon Moore again, his fists striking him madly, but he encountered only empty air. And again and again Moore snapped his fingers, and the white tongues leaped at Don, inflicting unendurable pain.

"Down, dog!" laughed Moore. "Down through the floor! You'll find some old friends of yours below!"

Again Don leaped, and again he reeled back in agony. Anywhere, to obtain refuge and surcease from pain.

"Down!" shouted Moore, pointing to the solid boards.

As Don looked at them, they seemed to dissolve. The room was growing shadowy. At the mere thought of obeying, the floor vanished. Don found himself descending into a dark crypt, lit by the faintly phosphorescent forms of human shadows.

Exhausted, but not cowed, he crouched like a wild beast against the rock wall. If this was death, he had never felt more alive.

Don Wentworth is in Moore's power, his very soul at the mercy of the black magician, and Lorna lost to him. Can Sudh Hafiz save him? What hope is there of regaining his bride and inflicting retribution upon the arch-criminal? But Godfrey Moore has a diabolical scheme to involve all in a common ruin. Be sure to order your copy of the October Weird Tales from your dealer now.

Over Time's Threshold

By HOWARD WANDREI

A weird story of the fourth dimension—a tale of speeding years and an eery experiment in Professor Capal's laboratory

A CLOCK ticking in an empty house. What might that bode? Finch turned to the girl and said, "The agent told me this place has been closed up for four years."

She nodded. It was an undeniable ticking, the heavy, clipped chucking sound of a large timepiece. The sound came from the one unexplored room on the ground floor, and Finch walked with the girl toward the door of the room with some curiosity.

The uncovered furnishings of the old house were gray with dust. There had been no caretaker for these four years, and its present condition gave it a cheap place in the market, even among prevailing low prices. The dusty furnishings were of a rather respectable nature, some of them rich enough to give the girl's eyes an incipient sparkle. And those of the room in the left wing which they were approaching were especially interesting. Subconsciously Finch noted that the door of this room was peculiar among those they had tried on the ground floor, in its standing open. The two paused on the threshold of the room and looked in, harking to the ticking of the clock.

A heavy table in the mathematical center of the room supported a large retort filled with a liquid colored a pale apple-green. The glass arm of the retort appeared to be depositing this fluid by slow drops into a fair-sized graduated glass whose capacity must have been about equal to the liquid in the retort. A drop now hung from the extended retort arm, minute accumulations gradually inviting its fall. Finch looked at the litter of test tubes and other apparatus on the table and glanced at the book-lined walls.

"Capal's laboratory," he said. The girl looked at him inquiringly.

"Professor Capal," he said again. "He used to live in this house, and it looks as though he worked in this room."

"Oh, he used to teach at the university."

"Yes. He sort of disappeared four years ago, and the house has been vacant since."

Loud ticking filled the room, and now the two watching the clock noted its peculiar character with some astonishment. It was of unusually heavy construction, and had a broad, engraved face set with antique numerals. Around this face the two hands were describing arcs with furious irregularity. The minute hand passed in rapid movement past the numeral three, stopped dead and retreated almost to the top of the face. Then both minute and hour hands disappeared in a blurred whirl. The heavy ticking became confused; the sound was full of unaccountable interruptions and double strikings and displayed as many irregularities as the movement of the hands. The weights in the case changed position uncertainly, and the motion of the pendulum could not be followed; it seemed to appear ubiquitously in its arc. The whir of the machinery behind the face suddenly stopped. Finch automatically took out his watch for the correct time and found to his surprize that

both gave the same hour precisely, 3:10.

At this moment the girl stepped into the room to examine the clock more closely. As she crossed the threshold and Finch was about to step after her the retort deposited a drop of the green stuff in the fractionally filled beaker on the table. The hesitating hands of the clock leaped and the girl vanished.

Finch looked about blankly.

"Sherna——" he called questioningly.

The ticking sounded rhythmically, now clear, now confused as with the sound of another escapement striking somewhat faster. The hands hesitated, whirled, stopped, swung back and forth like the steadying needle of a compass.

"Sherna!" Finch ran into the room and looked about him, breathless and frightened. And now the clock ticked with precision, but terrifying things were occurring about the house. He turned to the room's long windows and looked at the sky. It had blackened in less than a minute. It was night. He looked amazed at the stars, and then turned his shocked eyes from immediately succeeding daylight. The sun had burst like thunder through the belt of Orion.

Night again succeeded. The sun became a mere arc of fire across the sky—a yellow-golden rainbow, and night was an instant's blur of darkness. The hands of the ticking clock followed precisely the progress of the sun. The alternation of night and day fell swifter and swifter, and with Finch at the window it was like looking out of the quickly winking eye of a camera. A time camera. The succession of light and darkness blended into a tone of twilight under a gray sky sliced lower and lower by the arc of the sun, as cold crept into the room, and snow fell abroad over the land. Then the arching sun mounted the sky so rapidly that its many appearances seemed one broad band of fire in the sky.

Now it was midsummer, and the hands of the clock ceased their crazy whirl and hesitated, performing aimless arcs back and forth across the circled numbers of the face. This happening had almost the appearance of malice, as if to allow the man time to take account of his disaster.

FINCH looked about him. The room seemed the same; there was a thickening of the dust if anything. He wrote "Finch" in the dust on a free end of the apparatus-littered table, and noticed the new accumulation of green stuff at the end of the retort arm.

Capal had been a physicist, and this arrangement of liquid and glass looked like one of his remote experiments in chemistry. Finch thrust his forefinger into the liquid the beaker had collected, and withdrew it hastily. The stuff was so cold it burned, and pain rushed up his arm like a train of exploding needles. In the summer sky the sun marked the month as June, but Finch and the girl had entered the room in early August. He believed nothing, but accepted everything under the name of phenomena.

At the university Capal had propagated a number of scientifically malodorous ideas, and was accounted a trifle mad; Finch pleasantly conjectured that the professor had been tricked by his own queer notions, and wondered what his disappearance had to do with his laboratory.

The retort was mounted upon legs that separated it from the table by almost an inch. To one side was a clockwork mechanism screwed firmly to the table. Projecting from the side was a free metal arm, to the end of which was fastened a small plate of some reddish composition that glinted with metal filings. This plate would swing under the base of the retort, but a test-tube rack had fallen and blocked its progress. Copper wires led from binding-posts on the clockwork to a series of

jars of colorless liquid ranged along the side of the apparatus.

The girl had vanished before his eyes, and he himself had vanished from his own time. Where was she? Where Capal was. And Capal? Finch had good nerves, and knew the uselessness of dashing about looking for the girl aimlessly. He was caught in a trap, and the spring was set by Capal. The phenomena that played in this room were incident to the professor's clutter of glass and clockwork, and it was by means of these that he would find normality. He was ready to follow any adventure through to its completion, and now ascertained that the clockwork was in order by pushing out the metal arm to the limit of its swing. The composition plate was carried forward by clicking little wheels until it met the test-tube rack again.

As he was about to remove the rack he noticed the arm of the retort, and decided to start evenly by cleaning off the small quantity of liquid that had collected at its mouth. His finger tip wiped the glass, and at the contact his arm jerked convulsively with electric shock as he caught sight of the girl standing opposite him, looking about wildly.

Finch retreated from the table confusedly and called the girl's name. The clock's ticking blurred into one continuous sound of speaking metal, and the hands spun hazily. The room rocked and reeled. Again the world was in twilight, and in the speeding seasons Finch alternately shook with cold and perspired in summer heat. He sneezed violently; he was aware of a dim, avalanchian roar that clarified and advanced portentously. The old house crashed about his ears, having run into complete decay in a matter of minutes, and he choked in a chaos of dust and falling, rotten timbers.

Now he found himself prostrated among ruins that dwindled and supported vegetation even before his eyes. As he scrambled to his feet on a level of crumbled wood and mortar, howling chaos dinned in his ears, and then the world was calm and he was looking out over a late autumn wilderness.

There was no house; there was no city about him, and an ancient cottonwood sank its wrinkled trunk in the ground where the table had stood. A terrific shock tumbled him to the ground and when he arose the world was cold and the sun directly overhead was a great, dim-glowing mass that shed at most a red twilight.

Far off on the horizon was the glow of flame. A creeping blanket of smoke marked some great fire. About a hundred yards away, standing beneath another huge cottonwood, was the figure of a man anxiously examining the place all around.

He wore tattered clothes, and spectacles reflected light as he turned his head. A great beast of some odd canine species tightened a leash he gripped in one hand. The animal saw Finch and growled: the man looked up and shouted. Whereupon the beast jumped against the leash, and man and dog beat their way up the knoll toward Finch. All his skin prickled and his throat stiffened in fright.

"Stop!" he screamed.

"I'm Capal!" shouted the other. "Don't move! You *can't* move!"

Finch shuddered whitely. He heard a confusion of syllables, something about "clockwork," and looked around dazed at the suddenly present room of the old house. A drop was hanging from the arm of the retort. It fell, sparkled globularly on the table of liquid in the glass, and then became part of it. As he hastily ran through the door and sprawled on the floor outside he thought he heard the girl call his name. At which he raised his abraded cheek from the floor and looked

back, but the room was empty. He lay there for long and long, sleeping heavily through the early hours of the morning.

HE WAKENED with the sun pouring through the doorway, shafting the spot his body occupied. His face lay closely against the floor. His cheek hurt with raw soreness.

"God! God! God!" he said, and turned stiffly to look into the room, sitting up. A drop of green fell from the retort and the girl's body appeared on the floor, twisted angularly.

"Sherna!" He started to his feet and she disappeared. He stopped at the threshold, muttering to himself. The dust in which he had written his name, he noted grimly, was undisturbed. Then, burying his face in his arms and leaning against the wall, he listened to the aimless, staccato chucking of the clock.

The sportive changes in the room mocked any reasoning, and Finch was hungry. After walking around the empty house for a time, absently combing his disordered hair with his fingers, he left the place slowly and took his way to a near-by restaurant. The reality of food made Capal's laboratory seem exceedingly remote. But the girl was gone. *Where?*

Was that really Capal he had seen running up that lonely knoll? What cursed beast was that with him?

This time Finch circled the house and stood on the ledge that footed the windows of the laboratory. He could hear the clock ticking through the panes, like a mechanical heart. Otherwise everything was quiet. The windows were curious in themselves. They didn't open, and the panes were of quartz-glass. The place was built solidly, and would last for a long time. He glued his ear to the glass and listened to Capal's strange clock for a few minutes, and then peered closely at the only other significant object visible—the retort. At the end of its arm was a glimmer of green liquid.

He dropped from the window and walked across the unkept lawn to the front steps. Here he looked at his watch and noted that the girl had been absent for nearly sixteen hours. He had awakened at about six o'clock, just as a drop had fallen. Last night one fell at five, when they entered the room, and again at about ten, because of the modicum he removed with his finger. It took about four hours for one drop to accumulate, granting one had fallen while he had been asleep. So. His worried face suddenly straightened. He had seen the girl when he touched the retort, and when the drop fell as he awakened this morning; and heard her voice as he was leaving the room. Coincidences.

Hurriedly leaving his seat on the stoop he jumped the front steps. He snatched open the front door, dashed madly down the hall, and cut through the living-room into the left wing. About ten feet from the laboratory door he caught sight of the girl lying in the same position in which he had seen her last. He shouted and dived headlong through the yawning door as another green drop fell into the beaker.

His body sprawled into the table and he stood up dazed to find himself once more in the room alone. Thereupon he stumbled toward the door. The capricious clock again forecast the unknown with its spinning hands and syncopated ticking.

THE hill on which Capal's house was built flattened, and suffocating, humid masses of foliage crowded the spongy earth. Finch, lying prone, looked wearily and worried on the blanketed, peaty leaves and vegetation covering the ground, and saw near his face black beetles and a fat spider crawling horribly. A train of soft red insects about the size of peas mounted his arm on their clinging,

tentacle-like legs, and licked his shuddering flesh with little red tongues like small flames. He shook them off, and rising to his feet stamped on the lot, and dispatched the bloated spider and all the insects within the area the room would enclose. Then he fearfully returned to the spot his body had occupied when he first recognized this new change.

Here he stood waiting patiently, resolved that these things were so. First, two objects can not occupy the same space at the same time. Second, every four hours the retort deposited a magical green drop in the receptacle under the arm, and time momentarily identified itself with the fall of the drop. It was either Capal's scientific necromancy or coincidence, and Finch didn't care to dispute existence with the table or book-case. And leaving the room might mean never returning.

For four hours he would be lost in time, and therein he was prey to everything about him. He closed his eyes in a savage agony of nostalgia. A curious sensation in his feet attracted his attention. Looking down he saw the peat-blanketed ground mounting his legs graspingly. All around were palisades of trees, and the surface of the land was jungled with brush and vines. A huge creeper the size of his wrist commenced life at the base of a smooth-boled tree near by and careered through the air with dizzy life, whipping and cracking as it grew. The peat-level mounted to his knees. He stood stiffly while a shaggy beast hurtled past him, pursued by a barking uproar of wild dogs. He listened to the snarling tragedy dully. The level of earth withdrew suddenly, and whole stands of trees disappeared.

Time in retrograde? Cursing Capal's genius he sat weakly on the ground as he thought of going back and back and back. But there was little time after all to wonder whether the influence of the lost professor's apparatus were limited or not. There was just time to see a stagnant expanse of water, soupy and green and crawling with life. The damp, heavy atmosphere was unbearable. Upward gushes of moisture-laden air choked his lungs and spun his brain. The sun flamed whitely, and the forest reeked and shimmered with wisps of steam. Then the rushing vegetation swept in and buffeted him so that he stood on his feet against the billowing foliage. A lithe, active vine whirled through the air and burst through the fleshy part of his arm. Finch clutched futilely at it, crying out at the pain; the vine had already disappeared in the shuttling years.

Another period was running to its close. Finch looked at his watch, and stooped purposefully in one of time's hesitating moments to pick up from the ground a handy water-rotted root. He heard the ticking of the clock, and the laboratory of Capal's house formed instantly.

He stood anxiously eyeing the clock and retort, gripping the root. The arm gleamed greenly, and a drop of liquid hung ready to fall as the hands of the clock ceased their spasmodic whirling and swung back and forth over the twenty-first hour since the phenomena had begun. Finch gripped the root, poised to throw, while the skipping noise of the clock resolved itself into regular, heavy ticking. He looked eagerly for the girl, and now the hands were almost at a dead stop. The ticking became a slow hammering.

Finch trembled; with nervous accuracy he flung the root at the glass works on the table as the body of the girl appeared at his feet.

Quickly he stooped to lift the girl from the floor, though speed was no longer necessary. The root struck the retort squarely and smashed it into a green soup of liquid and shattered glass. The beaker

was raked from the table along with the wired jars, and a tinkle of dropping and breaking test-tubes and glass rods accompanied him as he left the room.

Where the green stuff touched the table the varnish fumed and fumed and blackened.

The clock stopped.

When Chaugnar Wakes

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

A billion miles beyond the suns
  Which gild the edge of space,
Great Chaugnar dreams, and there is hate
  And fury on its face.

Beyond the universe of stars
  Where red moons wane and swim,
Great Chaugnar stirs, and heaves its bulk
  Upon a crater's rim.

Its ropy arms descend to suck
  Dark nurture from the deeps
Of lava-pools within a cone
  That shines whilst Chaugnar sleeps.

Explorers from the outer stars
  Have glimpsed that glowing cone,
Have glimpsed the vast and silent shape
  Asleep upon its throne.

Explorers from the world we know
  Have seen that shape in dreams,
Have watched its shadow fall and spread
  On dim familiar streams.

When Chaugnar wakes, its mindless hate
  Will send it voyaging far:
It may set Sirius adrift,
  Or seek a humbler star.

A humbler star with satellites,
  Small planets in its train:
And that is why I kneel and kneel
  Before Great Chaugnar's fane.

The Death Mist

By CAPTAIN GEORGE H. DAUGHERTY, JR.

An eery story of the Great War and an officer who thought he was recreant to his trust

THROUGH the jagged stumps of the Argonne forest swirled the mist of a November evening. Lieutenant John Blackmer, U. S. Infantry, blundered into a clearing and stopped. To his bewildered gaze the trees assumed fantastic shapes, seemed to close around him, then to retreat far off in the eddying fog. The muffled popping of rifle fire he had heard faintly some moments before was silent. The war and all the world had vanished, leaving him alone in a universe of grayness. The heavy vapor lifted a trifle so that he could see that he stood on the edge of a shell hole. Beyond it was the dim outline of a big tree broken off near the ground. As the cloud lifted again, the white wood of the broken trunk showed in livid streaks. On the other side of the shell hole sprawled a dead man, with arms and legs extended woodenly, like some broken puppet.

Not so much weary as unutterably depressed in spirits, Lieutenant Blackmer sank down upon a log. For a time he stared idly, his mind as much a blank as the grayness around him, but always with a terrible sense of despair clutching him. Little by little his thoughts took definite shape. This was the end. Tonight, or tomorrow at the latest, he would stumble on his outfit, or, failing that, be arrested as a straggler. Then would come the inevitable questioning. Why had he become lost from his command? Why had he not carried out his orders?

For a moment a gleam of hope flashed through his mind as the thought struck him: perhaps Captain Racker, his company commander, had been killed or wounded. Might not his defection from duty pass unnoticed? Then realization rushed over him again like the icy waves of the fog. Even if Racker were dead, the three majors knew his story, and the lieutenant-colonel, and the colonel. At this moment, the regiment, or what was left of it, would be digging in for the night. He was missed, was being asked for, no doubt, at this moment. He groaned, or at least he thought he did; although no sound disturbed the silence of the clearing. They would think he was dead, no doubt, and so would forget him, *until he turned up*. For a minute he considered the possibility of desertion, then decided it was of no use. The military police would only pick him up, and he would have no defense. As matters stood, he could at least claim that he had been temporarily separated from his men, or stunned by a shell-burst. If this were only the first time, that might do. But it wasn't the first time.

As he stared into the shifting eddies of the mist he recalled vividly the colonel's headquarters, the grave face of the C. O., grizzled, stern; Captain Racker, with heavy eyebrows knit into a ferocious scowl; the solemn majors, even the rubicund Lieutenant-Colonel MacNamee with an expression of pain on his round and usually jovial countenance. He heard again the colonel:

"Lieutenant Blackmer, it plainly appears that you have failed in your duty.

For the second time you have become separated from the men in your command, leaving them in a perilous situation in the face of the enemy. I have heard that the first time this happened there *seemed* to be some extenuating circumstances; but this time we can not admit them. The only thing that saves you from a general court-martial is the fact that Corporal Jason of your command, by extraordinary presence of mind, managed to lead your patrol safely back to our lines. I tell you that if a man of your patrol had been killed I would have no choice but to order you under arrest. I would do it now were it not for the disgrace that would attach to the entire regiment. Therefore I will give you one more chance. Go back to your company, sir, and try to remember at least what you owe to this regiment, if not to yourself, your men, and your country. One more such failure to do your duty, and I will see that you go to Fort Leavenworth."

Lieutenant Blackmer remembered, with shame, the episodes to which the colonel referred. Not that he had meant to be a coward. Nor was he entirely sure that he was a coward. Twice he had been ordered to lead a night-patrol. The first time, all went well until suddenly guttural voices sounded in front. Machine-guns clattered. A German grappled with him. When he got free of the fellow by a stab with his trench-knife and three shots from his automatic, the platoon was gone; nor did he find them until they blundered into the American trench ten minutes after he had wormed his way there. None of them had seen him struggling with the German, so that his story was incredulously received by Captain Racker. The captain, however, said nothing about it, *that time*.

The second episode was worse. Blackmer writhed mentally as he thought of that night—the sudden star shells, the bursting grenades, his dive into the shell hole, the paralyzing fear that prevented him from leaving until it was too late to rejoin the patrol. This time, Captain Racker reported both episodes to the colonel. Blackmer shuddered again.

The fog had now lifted until it seemed to hang in the limbs of the trees of the clearing. The light being stronger, the lieutenant noticed the dead body again. It lay on its back with its arms flung wide, and its face turned away so that only a gray cheek was visible. For a moment the lieutenant had an impulse to go over and make sure that the man was dead. Then he noticed, even at that distance, the red splotch on the tunic and the heavy grotesque posture of the corpse. No living body, even in the soundest sleep, assumes the stuffed-doll attitudes of death.

Again he took up the thread of his recollections. Why had he failed again today? He had led his platoon out of their fox-holes at the time of the jump-off with the fixed determination to keep the men together and gain the objective. Nor had he felt any especial fear, even when they went through the enemy barrage just as they entered the wood. There he had seen two of his men blown to atoms, and three others wounded, one horribly, so that he screamed; and his screams followed the platoon for a long time through the trees. There were snipers and machine-gunners in the woods. Twice the platoon had to drop flat, and worm their way cautiously to flank the positions from which came those deadly streams of lead. Both times they lost heavily, and both times it was the lieutenant who led the final rush and hurled the grenades which put the machine-guns out of business, with the gunners sprawled across them. Re-

calling these things Blackmer again asked himself, Was he a coward? Yet, as he did so, he marvelled both at the thrill of combat he had felt in the morning, and at his present desperate and hopeless depression.

Again he resumed his recollections of the battle. So far, all was clear and even to his credit. After the capture of the second machine-gun he had reorganized the platoon, now reduced nearly half, and had sent runners to right and left. These returned in good time with reports of contact established. One of them carried a message from Captain Racker to move forward at once. He did so, though the undergrowth was very thick and a gray mist had already begun to form. What then? Another furious barrage. Shell bursts flaming red in the murk. Thunderclaps of sound. The shriek and hiss of fragments. It was just after this, he recalled, that they must have run into a German company. Brown and gray figures had grappled. Shouts, screams, the clatter of rifle fire, the booming of grenades: all seemed to mingle as in an endless nightmare. At first he was with his men; then they had evaporated. He had gone in frantic search of them. Once he was suddenly among a group of the enemy. He remembered, in a flash, their bucket-helmets and bearded faces all about him; again he was almost atop of a machine-gun that spat directly at him, yet never touched him. . . . Once more the mist swirled over all, until suddenly he realized that the battle was far away, and he was alone, he knew not how or why.

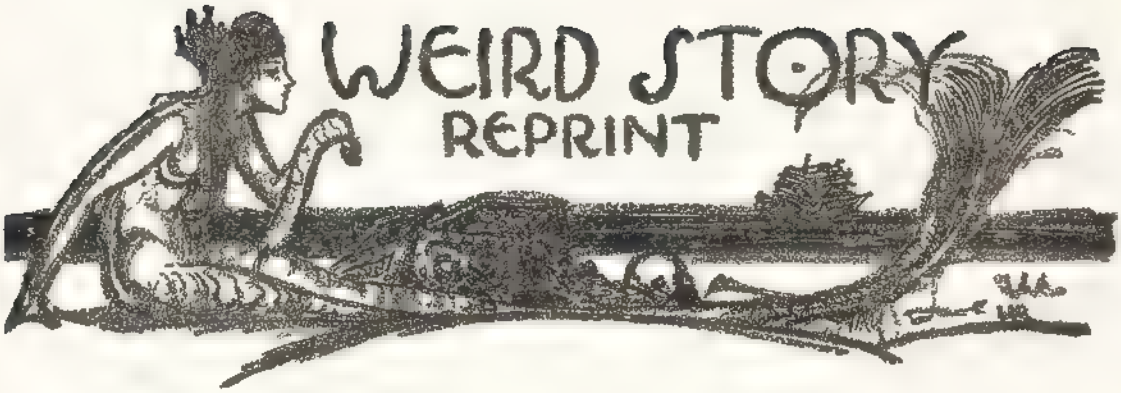
Looking up, he saw that the fog was nearly gone, but that the forest would soon be dark. Faint shots and the far-away clatter of a machine-gun in front of him showed in which direction the front lay.

He rose to go, with the leaden feeling that it was to his own execution. At the same time, he wondered why he seemed not to notice the weariness, hunger, and faintness that usually tortured him after such a day. Instead, he felt only a horrible despair.

All at once, with intense amazement, he looked again about him. . . . That broken tree—had he not seen it topple and fall, leaving that bunch of splinters on the stump like some fantastic, clutching hand? Then he recognized the clearing. The platoon had passed that way in the afternoon. Wat it not here that the second rain of shells had caught them, just as the fog closed down? And the dead man—he must have been one of Blackmer's own outfit.

Feeling his own despair lighten in a sudden wave of pity for the poor devil, Lieutenant Blackmer went toward the body. In this lonely place, he thought, the corpse might easily escape notice, and so remain unburied, while the man would be listed for ever among the missing. The lieutenant could at least take one of the neck-tags and give directions for the location and proper burial of the body. It would be the last service he could render any one of his men, and that but a poor return for his desertion of them in the thick of the battle.

So thinking, and again in the grip of the deathly chill at the thought of his own past and future, Lieutenant Blackmer approached the dead man. But what was this—an officer? Could it be Captain Racker? Blackmer bent over the corpse. Then, as the icy waves of the fog rolled over him for the last time, he realized the cause of his despair. *The convulsed and blood-stained features which stared at him were his own!*



Frankenstein

By MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT WALTON, captain of a ship seeking a passage through the Arctic Ocean, saw a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass over the ice-field to the north. In it sat a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature.

The next morning, after the ice had broken, he rescued from an ice-field another man, greatly emaciated. Only one of his dogs remained alive, for he had been marooned for some time. The man was Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist, who related to Captain Walton the incredible story of his life and how he came to be on the ice-floe.

Frankenstein had lived in Geneva with his father and his adopted sister, Elizabeth, to whom he was betrothed. His father sent him to school at Ingolstadt with his chum, Henry Clerval. There he progressed in his studies of natural science to such a point that he learned to create life.

Without taking Clerval into his secret, Frankenstein created a monster, eight feet tall and human in appearance, taking his materials from graveyards, slaughter-houses and dissecting-rooms. The monster was so terrible to look upon that Frankenstein fled from it, and the monster escaped.

Abandoned by its creator, the monster made its way to the vicinity of Frankenstein's home, where he murdered Frankenstein's younger brother, William, making it appear that Justine Moritz, a friend of the family, had committed the murder. Justine was convicted and sentenced to death; while Frankenstein, knowing that if he told the truth he would be considered a lunatic, was forced to keep silence.

Frankenstein met the monster in a hut in the Alps, and there the monster told him how he had learned to talk by observing a peasant family for many months, and how he had changed from a being with good impulses to a malevolent demon because when he revealed himself to the eyes of the peasants by entering their cottage, they had been so horrified by his frightful appearance that they beat him with sticks and drove him away; and all men's hands were raised against the hideous monster.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May

CHAPTER 16

"CURSED, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why, in that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed? I know not; despair had not yet taken possession of me; my feelings were those of rage and revenge. I could with pleasure have destroyed the cottage and its inhabitants, and have glutted myself with their shrieks and misery.

"When night came, I quitted my retreat, and wandered in the wood; and now, no longer restrained by the fear of discovery, I gave vent to my anguish in fearful howlings. I was like a wild beast that had broken the toils; destroying the objects that obstructed me, and ranging through the wood with a stag-like swiftness. Oh! what a miserable night I passed! The cold stars shone in mockery, and the bare trees waved their branches above me: now and then the sweet voice of a bird burst forth amidst the universal stillness. All, save me, were at rest or in enjoyment: I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathized with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin.

"But this was a luxury of sensation that could not endure; I became fatigued with excess of bodily exertion, and sank on the damp grass in the sick impotence of despair. There was none among the myriads of men that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No: from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and, more than all, against him who had formed me, and sent me forth to this insupportable misery.

"The sun rose; I heard the voices of men, and knew that it was impossible to return to my retreat during that day. Accordingly I hid myself in some thick underwood, determining to devote the ensuing hours to reflection on my situation.

"The pleasant sunshine, and the pure air of day, restored me to some degree of tranquillity; and when I considered what had passed at the cottage, I could not help believing that I had been too hasty in my conclusions. I had certainly acted imprudently. It was apparent that my conversation had interested the father in my behalf, and I was a fool in having exposed my person to the horror of his children. I ought to have familiarized the old De Lacey to me, and by degrees to have discovered myself to the rest of his family, when they should have been prepared for my approach. But I did not believe my errors to be irretrievable; and, after much consideration, I resolved to return to the cottage, seek the old man, and by my representations win him to my party.

"These thoughts calmed me, and in the afternoon I sank into a profound sleep; but the fever of my blood did not allow me to be visited by peaceful dreams. The horrible scene of the preceding day was for ever acting before my eyes; the females were flying, and the enraged Felix tearing me from his father's feet. I awoke exhausted; and, finding that it was already night, I crept forth from my hiding-place, and went in search of food.

"When my hunger was appeased, I directed my steps towards the well-known path that conducted to the cottage. All there was at peace. I crept into my hovel, and remained in silent expectation of the accustomed hour when the family arose. That hour passed, the sun mounted high in the heavens, but the cottagers did not appear. I trembled violently, apprehending some dreadful misfortune. The inside of the cottage was dark, and I heard no motion; I can not describe the agony of this suspense.

"Presently two countrymen passed by; but, pausing near the cottage, they entered into conversation, using violent gesticulations; but I did not understand what they said, as they spoke the language of the country, which differed from that of my protectors. Soon after, however, Felix approached with another man: I was surprized, as I knew that he had not quitted the cottage that morning, and waited anxiously to discover, from his discourse, the meaning of these unusual appearances.

" 'Do you consider,' said his companion to him, 'that you will be obliged to pay three months' rent, and to lose the produce of your garden? I do not wish to take any unfair advantage, and I beg therefore that you will take some days to consider of your determination.'

" 'It is utterly useless,' replied Felix; 'we can never again inhabit your cottage. The life of my father is in the greatest danger, owing to the dreadful circumstance that I have related. My wife and my sister will never recover from their horror. I entreat you not to reason with me any more. Take possession of your tenement, and let me fly from this place.'

"Felix trembled violently as he said this. He and his companion entered the cottage, in which they remained for a few minutes, and then departed. I never saw any of the family of De Lacey more.

"I CONTINUED for the remainder of the day in my hovel in a state of utter and stupid despair. My protectors had departed, and had broken the only link that held me to the world. For the first time the feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom, and I did not strive to control them; but, allowing myself to be borne away by the stream, I bent my mind towards injury and death. When I thought of my friends, of the mild voice of De Lacey, the gentle eyes of Agatha, and the exquisite beauty of the Arabian, these thoughts vanished, and a gush of tears somewhat soothed me. But again, when I reflected that they had spurned and deserted me, anger returned, a rage of anger; and, unable to injure anything human, I turned my fury towards inanimate objects. As night advanced, I placed a variety of combustibles around the cottage; and, after having destroyed every vestige of cultivation in the garden, I waited with forced impatience until the moon had sunk to commence my operations.

"As the night advanced, a fierce wind arose from the woods, and quickly dispersed the clouds that had loitered in the heavens: the blast tore along like a mighty avalanche, and produced a kind of insanity in my spirits that burst all bounds of reason and reflection. I lighted the dry branch of a tree, and danced with fury around the devoted cottage, my eyes still fixed on the western horizon, the edge of which the moon nearly touched. A part of its orb was at length hid, and I waved my brand; it sunk, and, with a loud scream, I fired the straw, and heath, and bushes, which I had collected. The wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it, and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues.

"As soon as I was convinced that no assistance could save any part of the habitation, I quitted the scene and sought for refuge in the woods.

"And now, with the world before me, whither should I bend my steps? I resolved to fly far from the scene of my misfortunes; but to me, hated and despised, every country must be equally horrible. At length the thought of you crossed my mind. I learned from your papers that you were my father, my creator; and to whom could I apply with more fitness

than to him who had given me life? Among the lessons that Felix had bestowed upon Safie, geography had not been omitted. I had learned from these the relative situations of the different countries of the earth. You had mentioned Geneva as the name of your native town; and towards this place I resolved to proceed.

"But how was I to direct myself? I knew that I must travel in a southwesterly direction to reach my destination; but the sun was my only guide. I did not know the names of the towns that I was to pass through, nor could I ask information from a single human being; but I did not despair. From you only could I hope for succor, although towards you I felt no sentiment but that of hatred. Unfeeling, heartless creator! you had endowed me with perceptions and passions, and then cast me abroad an object for the scorn and horror of mankind. But on you only had I any claim for pity and redress, and from you I determined to seek that justice which I vainly attempted to gain from any other being that wore the human form.

"MY TRAVELS were long, and the sufferings I endured intense. It was late in autumn when I quitted the district where I had so long resided. I traveled only at night, fearful of encountering the visage of a human being. Nature decayed around me, and the sun became heatless; rain and snow poured around me; mighty rivers were frozen; the surface of the earth was hard, and chill, and bare, and I found no shelter. Oh, earth! how often did I imprecate curses on the cause of my being! The mildness of my nature had fled, and all within me was turned to gall and bitterness. The nearer I approached to your habitation, the more deeply did I feel the spirit of revenge enkindled in my heart.

"Snow fell, and the waters were hardened; but I rested not. A few incidents now and then directed me, and I possessed a map of the country; but I often wandered wide from my path. The agony of my feelings allowed me no respite: no incident occurred from which my rage and misery could not extract its food; but a circumstance that happened when I arrived on the confines of Switzerland, when the sun had recovered its warmth, and the earth again began to look green, confirmed in an especial manner the bitterness and horror of my feelings.

"I generally rested during the day, and traveled only when I was secured by night from the view of man. One morning, however, finding that my path lay through a deep wood, I ventured to continue my journey after the sun had risen; the day, which was one of the first of spring, cheered even me by the loveliness of its sunshine and the balminess of the air. I felt emotions of gentleness and pleasure, that had long appeared dead, revive within me. Half surprized by the novelty of these sensations, I allowed myself to be borne away by them; and, forgetting my solitude and deformity, dared to be happy. Soft tears again bedewed my cheeks, and I even raised my humid eyes with thankfulness towards the blessed sun which bestowed such joy upon me.

"I continued to wind among the paths of the wood, until I came to its boundary, which was skirted by a deep and rapid river, into which many of the trees bent their branches, now budding with the fresh spring. Here I paused, not exactly knowing what path to pursue, when I heard the sound of voices that induced me to conceal myself under the shade of a cypress. I was scarcely hid, when a young girl came running towards the spot where I was concealed, laughing, as if she ran from some one in sport. She continued her course along the precipitous sides of

the river, when suddenly her foot slipt, and she fell into the rapid stream.

"I rushed from my hiding-place; and, with extreme labor from the force of the current, saved her, and dragged her to shore. She was senseless; and I endeavored by every means in my power to restore animation, when I was suddenly interrupted by the approach of a rustic, who was probably the person from whom she had playfully fled. On seeing me, he darted towards me, and tearing the girl from my arms, hastened towards the deeper parts of the wood. I followed speedily, I hardly knew why; but when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun, which he carried, at my body, and fired. I sunk to the ground, and my injurer, with increased swiftness, escaped into the wood.

"This was then the reward of my benevolence! I had saved a human being from destruction, and, as a recompense, I now writhed under the miserable pain of a wound, which shattered the flesh and bone. The feelings of kindness and gentleness which I had entertained but a few moments before gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind. But the agony of my wound overcame me; my pulses paused, and I fainted.

"For some weeks I led a miserable life in the woods, endeavoring to cure the wound which I had received. The ball had entered my shoulder, and I knew not whether it had remained there or passed through; at any rate I had no means of extracting it. My sufferings were augmented also by the oppressive sense of the injustice and ingratitude of their infliction. My daily vows rose for revenge—a deep and deadly revenge, such as would alone compensate for the outrages and anguish I had endured.

"After some weeks my wound healed, and I continued my journey. The labors I endured were no longer to be alleviated by the bright sun or gentle breezes of spring; all joy was but a mockery, which insulted my desolate state, and made me feel more painfully that I was not made for the enjoyment of pleasure.

"But my toils now drew near a close; and in two months from this time I reached the environs of Geneva.

"It was evening when I arrived, and I retired to a hiding-place among the fields that surround it, to meditate in what manner I should apply to you. I was oppressed by fatigue and hunger, and far too unhappy to enjoy the gentle breezes of evening, or the prospect of the sun setting behind the stupendous mountains of Jura.

"At this time a slight sleep relieved me from the pain of reflection, which was disturbed by the approach of a beautiful child, who came running into the recess I had chosen, with all the sportiveness of infancy. Suddenly, as I gazed on him, an idea seized me, that this little creature was unprejudiced, and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity. If, therefore, I could seize him, and educate him as my companion and friend, I should not be so desolate in this peopled earth.

"Urged by this impulse, I seized on the boy as he passed and drew him towards me. As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes and uttered a shrill scream: I drew his hand forcibly from his face, and said, 'Child, what is the meaning of this? I do not intend to hurt you; listen to me.'

"He struggled violently. 'Let me go,' he cried; 'monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces—You are an ogre—Let me go, or I will tell my papa.'

" 'Boy, you will never see your father again; you must come with me.'

" 'Hideous monster! let me go. My papa is a Syndic—he is Monsieur Frankenstein—he will punish you. You dare not keep me.'

" 'Frankenstein! you belong then to my enemy—to him towards whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim.'

"The child still struggled, and loaded me with epithets which carried despair to my heart; I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he lay dead at my feet.

"I gazed on my victim, and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph: clapping my hands, I exclaimed, 'I, too, can create desolation; my enemy is not invulnerable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him.'

"As I fixed my eyes on the child, I saw something glittering on his breast. I took it; it was a portrait of a most lovely woman. In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments I gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned: I remembered that I was for ever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright.

"Can you wonder that such thoughts transported me with rage? I only wonder that at that moment, instead of venting my sensations in exclamations and agony, I did not rush among mankind and perish in the attempt to destroy them.

"While I was overcome by these feelings, I left the spot where I had committed the murder, and seeking a more secluded hiding-place, I entered a barn which had appeared to me to be empty. A woman was sleeping on some straw; she was young: not indeed so beautiful as her whose portrait I held; but of an agreeable aspect, and blooming in the loveliness of youth and health. Here, I thought, is one of those whose joy-imparting smiles are bestowed on all but me. And then I bent over her, and whispered, 'Awake, fairest, thy lover is near — he who would give his life but to obtain one look of affection from thine eyes: my beloved, awake!'

"The sleeper stirred; a thrill of terror ran through me. Should she indeed awake, and see me, and curse me, and denounce the murderer? Thus would she assuredly act, if her darkened eyes opened and she beheld me. The thought was madness; it stirred the fiend within me—not I, but she shall suffer: the murder I have committed because I am for ever robbed of all that she could give me, she shall atone. The crime had its source in her: be hers the punishment! Thanks to the lessons of Felix and the sanguinary laws of man, I had learned how to work mischief. I bent over her, and placed the portrait securely in one of the folds of her dress. She moved again, and I fled.

"For some days I haunted the spot where these scenes had taken place; sometimes wishing to see you, sometimes resolved to quit the world and its miseries for ever. At length I wandered towards these mountains, and have ranged through their immense recesses, consumed by a burning passion which you alone can gratify. We may not part until you have promised to comply with my requisition. I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of

the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create."

CHAPTER 17

THE being finished speaking, and fixed his looks upon me in expectation of a reply. But I was bewildered, perplexed, and unable to arrange my ideas sufficiently to understand the full extent of his proposition. He continued——

"You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede."

The latter part of his tale had kindled anew in me the anger that had died away while he narrated his peaceful life among the cottagers, and, as he said this, I could no longer suppress the rage that burned within me.

"I do refuse it," I replied; "and no torture shall ever extort a consent from me. You may render me the most miserable of men, but you shall never make me base in my own eyes. Shall I create another like yourself, whose joint wickedness might desolate the world? Begone! I have answered you; you may torture me, but I will never consent."

"You are in the wrong," replied the fiend; "and, instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. Shall I respect man when he contemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness; and, instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that can not be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. I will revenge my injuries: if I can not inspire love, I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care: I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you shall curse the hour of your birth."

A fiendish rage animated him as he said this; his face was wrinkled into contortions too horrible for human eyes to behold; but presently he calmed himself and proceeded——

"I intended to reason. This passion is detrimental to me; for you do not reflect that you are the cause of its excess. If any being felt emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them an hundred and an hundred fold; for that one creature's sake, I would make peace with the whole kind! But I now indulge in dreams of bliss that can not be realized. What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself; the gratification is small, but it is all that I can receive, and it shall content me. It is true we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless, and free from the misery I now feel. Oh! my creator, make me happy; let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit! Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing; do not deny me my request!"

I was moved. I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences of my consent; but I felt that there was some

justice in his argument. His tale, and the feelings he now expressed, proved him to be a creature of fine sensations; and did I not as his maker owe him all the portions of happiness that it was in my power to bestow? He saw my change of feeling and continued——

"If you consent, neither you nor any other human being shall ever see us again: I will go to the vast wilds of South America. My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment. My companion will be of the same nature as myself, and will be content with the same fare. We shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on man, and will ripen our food. The picture I present to you is peaceful and human, and you must feel that you could deny it only in the wantonness of power and cruelty. Pitiless as you have been towards me, I now see compassion in your eyes; let me seize the favorable moment, and persuade you to promise what I so ardently desire."

"You propose," replied I, "to fly from the habitations of man, to dwell in those wilds where the beasts of the field will be your only companions. How can you, who long for the love and sympathy of man, persevere in this exile? You will return, and again seek their kindness, and you will meet with their detestation; your evil passions will be renewed, and you will then have a companion to aid you in the task of destruction. This may not be: cease to argue the point, for I can not consent."

"How inconstant are your feelings! but a moment ago you were moved by my representations, and why do you again harden yourself to my complaints? I swear to you, by the earth which I inhabit, and by you that made me, that, with the companion you bestow, I will quit the neighborhood of man, and dwell as it may chance in the most savage of places. My evil passions will have fled, for I shall meet with sympathy! my life will flow quietly away, and, in my dying moments, I shall not curse my maker."

His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred. I tried to stifle these sensations; I thought that, as I could not sympathize with him, I had no right to withhold from him the small portion of happiness which was yet in my power to bestow.

"You swear," I said, "to be harmless; but have you not already shown a degree of malice that should reasonably make me distrust you? May not even this be a feint that will increase your triumph by affording a wider scope for your revenge."

"How is this? I must not be trifled with: and I demand an answer. If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing of whose existence every one will be ignorant. My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded."

I paused some time to reflect on all he had related, and the various arguments which he had employed. I thought of the promise of virtues which he had displayed on the opening of his existence, and the subsequent blight of all kindly feeling by the loathing and scorn which his protec-

tors had manifested towards him. His power and threats were not omitted in my calculations: a creature who could exist in the ice-caves of the glaciers, and hide himself from pursuit among the ridges of inaccessible precipices, was a being possessing faculties it would be vain to cope with. After a long pause of reflection, I concluded that the justice due both to him and my fellow-creatures demanded of me that I should comply with his request. Turning to him, therefore, I said——

"I consent to your demand, on your solemn oath to quit Europe for ever, and every other place in the neighborhood of man, as soon as I shall deliver into your hands a female who will accompany you in your exile."

"I swear," he cried, "by the sun, and by the blue sky of heaven, and by the fire of love that burns my heart, that if you grant my prayer, while they exist you shall never behold me again. Depart to your home, and commence your labors: I shall watch their progress with unutterable anxiety; and fear not but that when you are ready I shall appear."

Saying this, he suddenly quitted me, fearful, perhaps, of any change in my sentiments. I saw him descend the mountain with greater speed than the flight of an eagle, and quickly lost among the undulations of the sea of ice.

His tale had occupied the whole day; and the sun was upon the verge of the horizon when he departed. I knew that I ought to hasten my descent towards the valley, as I should soon be encompassed in darkness; but my heart was heavy, and my steps slow. The labor of winding among the little paths of the mountains, and fixing my feet firmly as I advanced, perplexed me, occupied as I was by the emotions which the day had produced.

Night was far advanced when I came to the half-way resting-place, and seated myself beside the fountain. The stars shone at intervals, as the clouds passed from over them; the dark pines rose before me, and every here and there a broken tree lay on the ground: it was a scene of wonderful solemnity, and stirred strange thoughts within me. I wept bitterly; and clasping my hands in agony, I exclaimed, "Oh! stars, and clouds, and winds, ye are all about to mock me: if ye really pity me, crush sensation and memory; let me become as nought; but if not, depart, depart, and leave me in darkness."

These were wild and miserable thoughts; but I can not describe to you how the eternal twinkling of the stars weighed upon me, and how I listened to every blast of wind as if it were a dull ugly siroc on its way to consume me.

Morning dawned before I arrived at the village of Chamounix; I took no rest, but returned immediately to Geneva. Even in my own heart I could give no expression to my sensations—they weighed on me with a mountain's weight, and their excess destroyed my agony beneath them. Thus I returned home, and entering the house, presented myself to the family.

My haggard and wild appearance awoke intense alarm; but I answered no question, scarcely did I speak. I felt as if I were placed under a ban—as if I had no right to claim their sympathies—as if never more might I enjoy companionship with them. Yet even thus I loved them to adoration; and to save them, I resolved to dedicate myself to my most abhorred task. The prospect of such an occupation made every other circumstance of existence pass before me like a dream; and that thought only had to me the reality of life.

CHAPTER 18

DAY after day, week after week, passed away on my return to Geneva; and I could not collect the courage to recon-

mence my work. I feared the vengeance of the disappointed fiend, yet I was unable to overcome my repugnance to the task which was enjoined me. I found that I could not compose a female without again devoting several months to profound study and laborious disquisition. I had heard of some discoveries having been made by an English philosopher, the knowledge of which was material to my success, and I sometimes thought of obtaining my father's consent to visit England for this purpose; but I clung to every pretense of delay, and shrunk from taking the first step in an undertaking whose immediate necessity began to appear less absolute to me.

A change indeed had taken place in me: my health, which had hitherto declined, was now much restored; and my spirits, when unchecked by the memory of my unhappy promise, rose proportionably. My father saw this change with pleasure, and he turned his thoughts towards the best method of eradicating the remains of my melancholy, which every now and then would return by fits, and with a devouring blackness overcast the approaching sunshine.

At these moments I took refuge in the most perfect solitude. I passed whole days on the lake alone in a little boat, watching the clouds, and listening to the rippling of the waves, silent and listless. But the fresh air and bright sun seldom failed to restore me to some degree of composure; and, on my return, I met the salutations of my friends with a readier smile and a more cheerful heart.

It was after my return from one of these rambles, that my father, calling me aside, thus addressed me:

"I am happy to remark, my dear son, that you have resumed your former pleasures, and seem to be returning to yourself. And yet you are still unhappy, and still avoid our society. For some time I was lost in conjecture as to the cause of this; but yesterday an idea struck me, and if it is well founded, I conjure you to avow it. Reserve on such a point would be not only useless, but draw down treble misery on us all."

I trembled violently at his exordium, and my father continued——

"I confess, my son, that I have always looked forward to your marriage with our dear Elizabeth as the tie of our domestic comfort, and the stay of my declining years. You were attached to each other from your earliest infancy; you studied together, and appeared, in dispositions and tastes, entirely suited to one another. But so blind is the experience of man that what I conceived to be the best assistants to my plan may have entirely destroyed it. You, perhaps, regard her as your sister, without any wish that she might become your wife. Nay, you may have met with another whom you may love; and, considering yourself as bound in honor to Elizabeth, this struggle may occasion the poignant misery which you appear to feel."

"My dear father, reassure yourself. I love my cousin tenderly and sincerely. I never saw any woman who excited, as Elizabeth does, my warmest admiration and affection. My future hopes and prospects are entirely bound up in the expectation of our union."

"The expression of your sentiments of this subject, my dear Victor, gives me more pleasure than I have for some time experienced. If you feel thus, we shall assuredly be happy, however present events may cast a gloom over us. But it is this gloom, which appears to have taken so strong a hold of your mind, that I wish to dissipate. Tell me, therefore, whether you object to an immediate solemnization of the marriage. We have

been unfortunate, and recent events have drawn us from that everyday tranquillity befitting my years and infirmities. You are younger; yet I do not suppose, possessed as you are of a competent fortune, that an early marriage would at all interfere with any future plans of honor and utility that you may have formed. Do not suppose, however, that I wish to dictate happiness to you, or that a delay on your part would cause me any serious uneasiness. Interpret my words with candor, and answer me, I conjure you, with confidence and sincerity."

I listened to my father in silence, and remained for some time incapable of offering any reply. I revolved rapidly in my mind a multitude of thoughts, and endeavored to arrive at some conclusion. Alas! to me the idea of an immediate union with my Elizabeth was one of horror and dismay. I was bound by a solemn promise, which I had not yet fulfilled, and dared not break; or, if I did, what manifold miseries might not impend over me and my devoted family! Could I enter into a festival with this deadly weight yet hanging round my neck, and bowing me to the ground? I must perform my engagement, and let the monster depart with his mate, before I allowed myself to enjoy the delight of an union from which I expected peace.

I remembered also the necessity imposed upon me of either journeying to England, or entering into a long correspondence with those philosophers of that country, whose knowledge and discoveries were of indispensable use to me in my present undertaking. The latter method of obtaining the desired intelligence was dilatory and unsatisfactory: besides, I had an insurmountable aversion to the idea of engaging myself in my loathsome task in my father's house, while in habits of familiar intercourse with those I loved. I knew that a thousand fearful accidents might occur, the slightest of which would disclose a tale to thrill all connected with me with horror. I was aware also that I should often lose all self-command, all capacity of hiding the harrowing sensations that would possess me during the progress of my unearthly occupation. I must absent myself from all I loved while thus employed. Once commenced, it would quickly be achieved, and I might be restored to my family in peace and happiness. My promise fulfilled, the monster would depart for ever. Or (so my fond fancy imaged) some accident might meanwhile occur to destroy him, and put an end to my slavery for ever.

These feelings dictated my answer to my father. I expressed a wish to visit England; but, concealing the true reasons of this request, I clothed my desires under a guise which excited no suspicion, while I urged my desire with an earnestness that easily induced my father to comply. After so long a period of an absorbing melancholy, that resembled madness in its intensity and effects, he was glad to find that I was capable of taking pleasure in the idea of such a journey, and he hoped that change of scene and varied amusement would, before my return, have restored me entirely to myself.

The duration of my absence was left to my own choice; a few months, or at most a year, was the period contemplated. One paternal kind precaution he had taken to ensure my having a companion. Without previously communicating with me, he had, in concert with Elizabeth, arranged that Clerval should join me at Strasburgh. This interfered with the solitude I coveted for the prosecution of my task; yet at the commencement of my journey the presence of my friend could in no way be an impediment, and truly I rejoiced that thus I should be saved many hours of loneliness

maddening reflection. Nay, Henry might stand between me and the intrusion of my foe. If I were alone, would he not at times force his abhorred presence on me, to remind me of my task, or to contemplate its progress?

To England, therefore, I was bound, and it was understood that my union with Elizabeth should take place immediately on my return. My father's age rendered him extremely averse to delay. For myself, there was one reward I promised myself from my detested toils—one consolation for my unparalleled sufferings; it was the prospect of that day when, enfranchized from my miserable slavery, I might claim Elizabeth, and forget the past in my union with her.

I now made arrangements for my journey; but one feeling haunted me, which filled me with fear and agitation. During my absence I should leave my friends unconscious of the existence of their enemy, and unprotected from his attacks, exasperated as he might be by my departure. But he had promised to follow me wherever I might go; and would he not accompany me to England? This imagination was dreadful in itself, but soothing, inasmuch as it supposed the safety of my friends. I was agonized with the idea of the possibility that the reverse of this might happen. But through the whole period during which I was slave of my creature, I allowed myself to be governed by the impulses of the moment; and my present sensations strongly intimated that the fiend would follow me, and exempt my family from the danger of his machinations.

It was in the latter end of September that I again quitted my native country. My journey had been my own suggestion, and Elizabeth, therefore, acquiesced: but she was filled with disquiet at the idea of my suffering, away from her, the inroads of misery and grief. It had been her care which provided me a companion in Clerval — and yet a man is blind to a thousand minute circumstances, which call forth a woman's sedulous attention. She longed to bid me hasten my return,—a thousand conflicting emotions rendered her mute as she bade me a tearful silent farewell.

I threw myself into the carriage that was to convey me away, hardly knowing whither I was going, and careless of what was passing around. I remembered only, and it was with a bitter anguish that I reflected on it, to order that my chemical instruments should be packed to go with me. Filled with dreary imaginations, I passed through many beautiful and majestic scenes; but my eyes were fixed and unobserving. I could only think of the bourne of my travels, and the work which was to occupy me whilst they endured.

After some days spent in listless indolence, during which I traversed many leagues, I arrived at Strasburgh, where I waited two days for Clerval. He came. Alas, how great was the contrast between us! He was alive to every new scene; joyful when he saw the beauties of the setting sun, and more happy when he beheld it rise, and recommence a new day.

He pointed out to me the shifting colors of the landscape, and the appearances of the sky. "This is what it is to live," he cried, "now I enjoy existence! But you, my dear Frankenstein, wherefore are you despending and sorrowful?"

In truth, I was occupied by gloomy thoughts, and neither saw the descent of the evening star, nor the golden sunrise reflected in the Rhine. And you, my friend, would be far more amused with the journal of Clerval, who observed the scenery with an eye of feeling and delight,

(Please turn to page 431)

SINCE we announced that we would not reprint *Dracula,* the readers of this magazine who dislike serial reprints have centered their attacks upon *Frankenstein.* We asked, you remember, whether you would like us to reprint some of the lesser known weird novels, after *Frankenstein* is completed, as it will be in our December issue. So far, those of you who do not want us to use any serial reprints are in a majority, as shown by your letters.

"There seems to be a considerable diversity of opinion as to what your policy toward reprints should be," writes Paul S. Smith, of Orange, New Jersey. "But there is one fact that no one can deny—namely, that the back numbers of WEIRD TALES constitute a veritable treasure house of fine weird stories; and I am sure that an overwhelming majority of the readers would like to have the best of these stories reprinted from time to time. When you reprint a story that is *not* from an old issue of your magazine there is very often the probability that most of your readers are familiar with it, because so many lovers of weird fiction have been reading this type of literature for years. Furthermore, most of these well-known weird stories by noted writers of the past are easily obtained from public libraries. Many readers, no doubt, have some of them in their own book collections. These facts constitute a strong argument against reprinting well-known weird stories. If the stories are not well known, the case is different; but such stories, though always welcome, are not always easy to find."

"How about some good spooky ghost stories, and some witchcraft and black magic tales?" queries Mrs. C. G. McDowell, of Santa Monica, California. "The serial by Seabury Quinn is splendid—please give us more and more about Jules de Grandin; also more creepy poetry with a swing like *All Hallow's E'en* and *Madman's Song*—and shorts like Maurice Level's *Night and Silence.*"

Llon Penhall Rees, of Toronto, writes to the Eyrie: "Why have serials? The atmosphere of horror and weirdness can not be recaptured after a month elapses. Instead of publishing long stories, always available in book form, why not give us lists—author, title, publisher, price, with a brief synopsis? Then we could buy these books if we wished. It seems to be your fashion to pretend that no one can hope to equal Poe, and very few can expect to compete with Lovecraft. Giving full credit to both these fine writers, I claim that every issue contains at least one story as good as their best, and often much better! These two men seem to be your idols, and you

(Please turn to page 428)

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(Continued from page 426)

expect us to bow down and worship! I am a free-thinker, and, wishing the best, believing in acknowledging it when found."

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes to the Eyrie: "If you continue reprint serials, please use only those stories that are out of print and those not available in the English language. *The Devil's Bride* rose to a smashing conclusion in the great July issue of WEIRD TALES. The African scene is the best in the entire story. I hope that the story will be put in book form and in the films. *The Phantom Hand* by Victor Rousseau promises to be even better than *The Devil's Bride,* if the first installment is a sample of what is to come. The story starts right off without a whole lot of introduction. Welcome back, Mr. Rousseau."

Writes Thomas de V. Harper from Marshfield, Oregon: "Just to introduce myself, would say that I have not missed a copy of WEIRD TALES since the very first issue. I want to register my vote against serial reprints. My choice of the reprint department would be one complete story each month, taken from one of the old issues of WEIRD TALES. Stories such as *Dracula, Frankenstein, The Wolf-Leader,* and the like are available to those that want them, while most of the outstanding stories which have been published in WEIRD TALES are not available anywhere else. I agree with Guy Detrick, in the July Eyrie, that the style of writing of these older authors is decidedly tiresome to present-day readers. *Frankenstein* may have been a wonderful novel in its day, but it is to me one of the most tiresome things I have ever tried to read. You might have turned that over to Seabury Quinn and had him write it up to date and you would have had something worth while. Seabury Quinn is the best writer on your staff. But—I made the suggestion once before—I would like to see de Grandin fail once, actually miss altogether, and have Trowbridge bring the case to a successful conclusion. I would like to see what de Grandin would say to that. And for Pete's sake, don't adopt the trick of putting a group of silly questions at the end of your serials, as you did this month at the end of *The Phantom Hand.* End your serials with a simple, dignified "To be continued" and let it go at that. I don't have much use for serials anyway, and for my part would rather there weren't any in the magazine at all. I want to see some more stories of the interstellar patrol by Edmond Hamilton. Some readers apparently do not like these, but I think they are the best interplanetary stories I have read. They were action stories, and not burdened with alleged scientific descriptions of various sorts of machinery—they were written in a manner that implied that we knew all that stuff, and got on to the action of the plot. I like 'em, and hope there will be some more. I want to thank you for the many pleasant hours the magazine has brought me, and to assure you that I hope to continue to read it for a long time to come."

A letter from Thomas C. Marks, of Jackson, Tennessee, says: "I have just completed Quinn's novel, *The Devil's Bride,* and think it by far the most marvelous story ever published in your magazine. From beginning to end it held my attention as no other story has ever done. I have been a regular reader of WEIRD TALES since April, 1924. In fact, I still have that issue, and am saving it for Lovecraft's poem,

(Please turn to page 430)

Coming Next Month

IT IS hard to convey the full awfulness of that scene. In the first place, the room was not dark; it was alight with an unearthly greenish glow which emanated from the uncouth shape before me. No hue of heaven or hell was ever like that oily, viscous mass of writhing vapor, dangling half-way between floor and ceiling, above Vernon's chair. No living thing born of woman was ever even remotely like that hideous abhorrence. No stench from the foulest slaughter-house ever approached that vile reek of living death and embryonic putrescence.

The thing had no certain outlines, no definite form. It possessed no single human characteristic—arms, legs, or face. It was a thousand times more horrible than any twisted mockery of human life. It was like a monstrous malformed devil-fish with bloated, swollen tentacles; and from the very center of its loathsome mass came the sound of its breathing.

Breathing, I call it! God, that sound! Like a gigantic slug the thing enveloped Vernon's chair—and it was *eating!* I could hear the sucking of its unseen maw. I could hear its shapeless lips—if it *had* lips—drooling blood and tearing flesh. I could hear the bones snapping, splintering, grinding.

And then I saw! . . .

What it was that Doctor Moller saw in that horrific instant, when physical darkness rolled like a thick fog and wrapped an entire community in its folds, makes a blood-freezing tale of gripping interest and fascination. It will be printed complete in the October WEIRD TALES:

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—ALSO—

THE HEART OF SIVA
By Seabury Quinn

A startling weird mystery tale of eery murders and the gruesome fate of the dancers in the Ballet Russe—a tale of Hindoo fanaticism.

THE DOGS OF DOCTOR DWANN
By Edmond Hamilton

An eery, blood-chilling story of weird surgery and the things that ran in the night and howled through the forest in the Adirondack hills.

THE WAND OF DOOM
By Jack Williamson

Spiders, huge as horses and venomous as cobras, made Paul Telfair's dreams hideous—and then came the ghastly horror of reality when he was no longer dreaming—a weird-scientific tale.

DEMONS OF THE FILM COLONY
By Theodore Le Berthon

A gigantic hoax was perpetrated on the author by "Dracula" Lugosi and "Frankenstein" Karloff, aided and abetted by the photographer.

THE TESTAMENT OF ATHAMMAUS
By Clark Ashton Smith

A horrific story of an incredible monster that struck panic terror to the hearts of an entire city—as told by the state executioner.

October WEIRD TALES Out September 1

(Continued from page 428)

Nemesis. For nine years WEIRD TALES has been growing better and better. That is something that few magazines can boast."

Writes Mrs. M. R. McCrorey, of Glendale, California: "I would like very much to see some stories about witches and wizards in WEIRD TALES. Couldn't you give us a story about the witches of olden days, with their spells and familiars?" [WEIRD TALES has from time to time published such stories in the past, and will continue to do so in the future. Noteworthy among those we have already published were the series of witchcraft stories by Seabury Quinn, and Paul Ernst's story, *A Witch's Curse*.—THE EDITORS.]

"I am not a reader of long standing," writes Fred C. Miles, of New Providence, New Jersey, "but I must cast my vote in the *Dracula* 'reprint' discussion. Like most of your other readers, I know this book almost by heart; therefore I am indeed joyful to see your announcement in the July issue that you have decided to forego its reprinting. The little fantastic verses which appear in the magazine are exceptionally good. *The Little Gods Wait*, in particular, was well written. Guess I'll look through the Coming Next Month announcement. Ah! what's this? A story by Clark Ashton Smith? *The Maker of Gargoyles*—boy! that sounds interesting! Ah, well, what has Mr. Smith written that isn't interesting? He, undoubtedly (well, in my opinion, anyway) is your best author. Seabury Quinn is excellent, but Smith is super-excellent! I am thrilled indeed to see notice of a coming novel by Otis Adelbert Kline. May his stories never cease to appear! Clark Ashton Smith, Seabury Quinn, and Otis A. Kline are a triumvirate who never fail to please."

Readers, we shall be glad if you will let us know what are your favorite stories in this issue. The concluding installment of Seabury Quinn's novel of devil-worship, *The Devil's Bride*, won first place in the July issue, with Robert E. Howard's eery story of Africa, *Wings in the Night*, in second place.

My Favorite Stories in the September Weird Tales Are:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
(3)_____	_____

I do not like the following stories:

(1)_____ Why?_____

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Frankenstein

(Continued from page 425)

than in listening to my reflections. I, a miserable wretch, haunted by a curse that shut up every avenue to enjoyment.

We had agreed to descend the Rhine in a boat from Strasburgh to Rotterdam, whence we might take shipping for London. During this voyage, we passed many willowy islands, and saw several beautiful towns. We stayed a day at Mannheim, and, on the fifth from our departure from Strasburgh, arrived at Mayence. The course of the Rhine below Mayence becomes much more picturesque. The river descends rapidly, and winds between hills, not high, but steep, and of beautiful forms. This part of the Rhine, indeed, presents a singularly variegated landscape. In one spot you view rugged hills, ruined castles overlooking tremendous precipices, with the dark Rhine rushing beneath; and, on the sudden turn of a promontory, flourishing vineyards, with green sloping banks, and a meandering river, and populous towns occupy the scene.

We traveled at the time of the vintage, and heard the song of the laborers, as we glided down the stream. Even I, depressed in mind, and my spirits continually agitated by gloomy feelings, even I was pleased. I lay at the bottom of the boat, and, as I gazed on the cloudless blue sky, I seemed to drink in a tranquillity to which I had long been a stranger. And if these were my sensations, who can describe those of Henry? He felt as if he had been transported to fairyland, and enjoyed a happiness seldom tasted by man.

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NEXT MONTH

The Heart of Siva

By SEABURY QUINN

A STARTLING weird mystery tale, packed with thrills and chills—about the eery murders that horrified a Russian ballet troupe—the terrible fate of two beautiful dancers who impersonated the Hindoo god Siva, with his many arms—a fast-moving story of religious fanaticism and blood-expiation.

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"I have seen," he said, "the most beautiful scenes of my own country; I have visited the lakes of Lucerne and Uri, where the snowy mountains descend almost perpendicularly to the water, casting black and impenetrable shades, which would cause a gloomy and mournful appearance, were it not for the most verdant islands that relieve the eye by their gay appearance; I have seen this lake agitated by a tempest, when the wind tore up whirlwinds of water, and gave you an idea of what the waterspout must be on the great ocean; and the waves dash with fury the base of the mountain, where the priest and his mistress were overwhelmed by an avalanche, and where their dying voices are still said to be heard amid the pauses of the nightly wind; I have seen the mountains of La Valais, and the Pays de Vaud: but this country, Victor, pleases me more than all those wonders."

Beyond Cologne we descended to the plains of Holland; and we resolved to post the remainder of our way; for the wind was contrary, and the stream of the river was too gentle to aid us.

Our journey here lost the interest arising from beautiful scenery; but we arrived in a few days at Rotterdam, whence we proceeded by sea to England. It was on a clear morning, in the latter days of December, that I first saw the white cliffs of Britain. The banks of the Thames presented a new scene; they were flat, but fertile, and almost every town was marked by the remembrance of some story. We saw Tilbury Fort, and remembered the Spanish armada; Gravesend, Woolwich, and Greenwich, places which I had heard of even in my country.

At length we saw the numerous steeples of London, St. Paul's towering above all, and the Tower famed in English history.

(To be continued next month)

W. T.—9

The Dragoman's Confession

By

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

THEN Lo Foo danced.

Never before had I seen her so beautiful, so radiant, or so madly alluring. The key color of the ensemble she had chosen for that dance was red, the color of love. Her skirt was a tenuous, diaphanous material of a shade that matched the red of her lips, and was suspended on a girdle of cloth of gold, studded with rubies. Her breast shields were blood-red coral beads, woven on golden threads, and her anklets and armlets were gold, decked with figures of red lacquer.

The dance was one of passionate love—of wooing and of mating. Never had she danced thus before me, and never had I been so powerfully affected. The throbbing music, the rhythmic swaying of her slim, young body, and the matchless perfection of her face and figure, held me enthralled.

Suddenly I realized that the dance was over. The music had ceased, and the little dancer had flung herself down before me. I caught her up, and she nestled in my arms like a tired child. But her eyes were the eyes of a woman, and they were starry with a light which a man, though he see it but once, may never mistake. The fragrance of her breath intoxicated me like heady wine. Unmindful of the slave-girls and the eunuch, I claimed the sweetness of her lips. Her arms stole about my neck, and clung. Still holding her in my arms, I stood up, and carrying her into our room, gently lowered her to the *diwan*.

Behind me, Musa, the eunuch, closed the door. . . .

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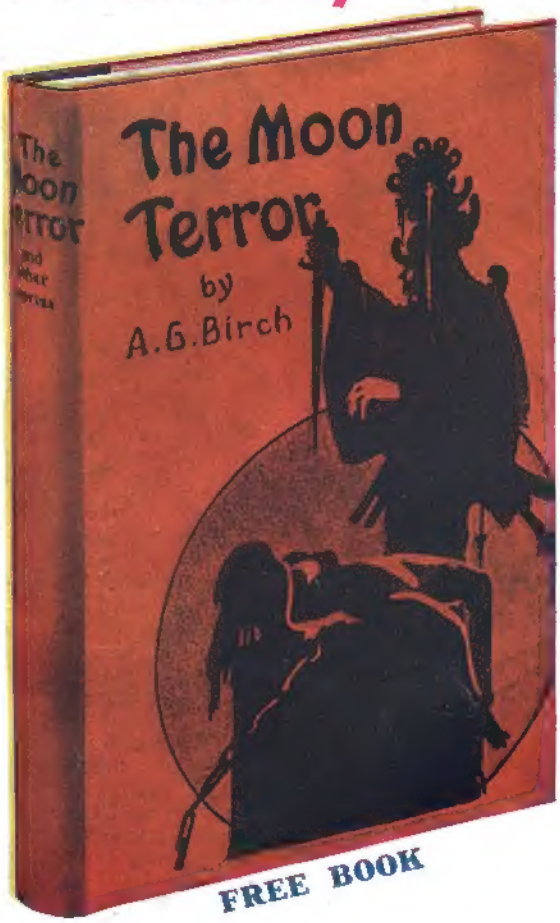

THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

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